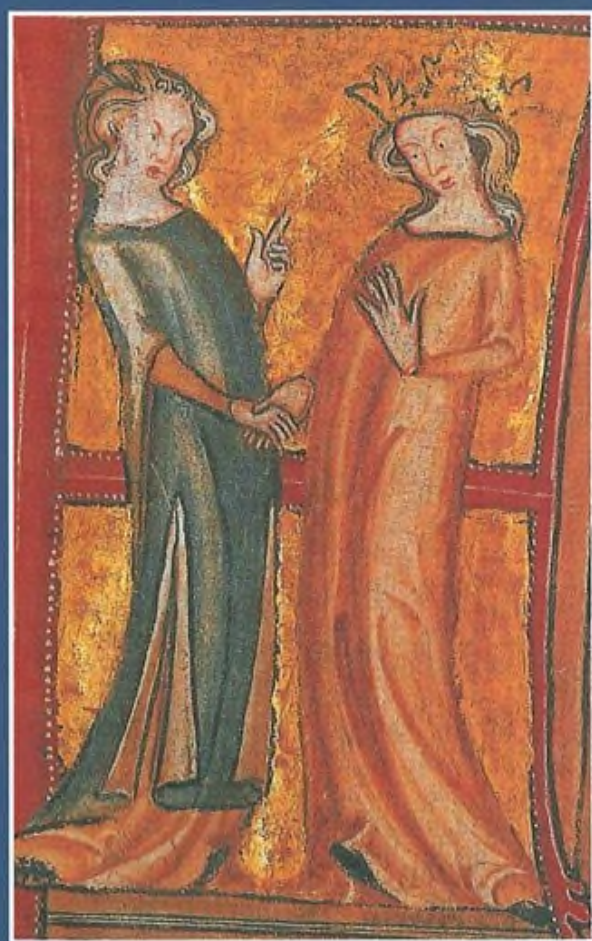


*Medieval Texts and Cultures
of Northern Europe*

Strategies of Passion
Love and Marriage in Old Norse Society



BREPOLS

by Bjørn Bandlien

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STRATEGIES OF PASSION

Love and Marriage in Medieval Iceland and Norway

Medieval Texts and Cultures of Northern Europe

MEDIEVAL TEXTS AND CULTURES OF NORTHERN EUROPE

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Bjørn Bandlien

(trans. Betsy van der Hoek)



BREPOLS

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To Signe

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Preface

My interest in love and marriage in the Middle Ages was partly inspired by Professor Arnved Nedkvitne, who lectures on medieval history at the University of Oslo. He has read through several drafts of every chapter and made me reread the sources and sharpen my arguments in many respects. With a stroke of good luck, I began my study at the time Agnes Arnórsdóttir was at the University of Oslo. She was the one who urged me to use a gender perspective on whatever subject I was interested in. I can only hope that this book reflects some of her insights and enthusiasm.

This book is a translation of *Å finne den rette: Kjærlighet, ekteskap og samfunn i norrøn middelalder*, published by the Norwegian Historical Association in 2001. The same year, Dr John Arnold at Birkbeck College, London, generously offered to read a translation of this work. Fortunately, I got in touch with Betsy van der Hoek-Springer, who has done a marvellous job in translating (and often improving) the Norwegian manuscript. Remaining faults in this book are entirely my own responsibility. The translation was generously funded by NORLA and the Norwegian Research Council.

The content of this translation is basically the same as in the original, but with some emendations and a few additions. Translations from the sources are mostly my own; exceptions are indicated in the notes.

I would never have been able to complete this study without the support of my family. The patience of my wife, Signe, and my children, Miriam and Sander, has been beyond what could reasonably be expected. Thank you for your love.

Abbreviations

Ágr	<i>Ágrip af Nóregskonungasögum</i>
B	<i>Borgarþingslög</i>
Band	<i>Bandamanna saga</i>
Barl	<i>Barlaams ok Josaphats saga</i>
Bgl	<i>Bøglunga sögur</i>
Bj	<i>Bjarkeyjarréttr</i>
BjHs	<i>Bjarnar saga Hitdælakappa</i>
Cl	<i>Kláriúss saga</i>
DI	<i>Diplomatarium Islandicum</i>
DN	<i>Diplomatarium Norvegicum</i>
Drl	<i>Droplaugarsona saga</i>
E	<i>Eiðsivaþingslög</i>
Eg	<i>Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar</i>
EK	<i>Erikskrönikan</i>
Erx	<i>Erex saga Artuskappa</i>
Eyr	<i>Eyrbyggja saga</i>
F	<i>Frostapingslög</i>
FGT	<i>First Grammatical Treatise</i>
Finnb	<i>Finnboga saga ramma</i>
Flat	<i>Flateyjarbók</i>
Flj	<i>Fljótsdæla saga</i>
Flóa	<i>Flóamanna saga</i>

Fóst	<i>Fóstbræðra saga</i>
Frs	<i>Friðþjófs saga</i>
Fsk	<i>Fagrskinna – Nóregs konunga tal</i>
G	<i>Gulapingslög</i>
GHs	<i>Göngu-Hrólfs saga</i>
Gís	<i>Gísla saga Súrssonar</i>
Gnl	<i>Gunnlaugs saga orms tungu</i>
Grg	<i>Grágás</i>
Grs	<i>Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar</i>
GsK	<i>Gunnars saga Keldugnúpsfífls</i>
H	<i>Hirðskrá</i>
Hálfs	<i>Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka</i>
Hall	<i>Hallfreðar saga</i>
Hb	<i>Hauksbók</i>
Herv	<i>Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks</i>
HH	<i>Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar</i>
HÍ	<i>Hákonar saga Ívarssonar</i>
Hkr	<i>Heimskringla</i>
Hákherð	<i>Hákonar saga herðibreiðs</i>
Hsg	<i>Hákonar saga góða</i>
Hsgr	<i>Haralds saga gráfeldar</i>
Hsh	<i>Haralds saga harðráði</i>
Hshá	<i>Haralds saga ins hárfagra</i>
Hss	<i>Haraldssona saga</i>
Msb	<i>Magnúss saga berfætts</i>
MsbHg	<i>Magnúss saga blinda ok Haralds gilla</i>
MsE	<i>Magnúss saga Erlingssonar</i>
Msg	<i>Magnúss saga góða</i>
Mss	<i>Magnússona saga</i>
Ósh	<i>Ólafs saga Haraldssonar</i>
Ósk	<i>Ólafs saga kyrra</i>
ÓsT	<i>Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar</i>
Ys	<i>Ynglinga saga</i>
HMS	<i>Heilagra manna sögur</i>
HN	<i>Historia Norwegie</i>
HomIsl	<i>Homiliúbók, Icelandic</i>
HomNor	<i>Homiliúbók, Norwegian</i>

HsG	<i>Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar</i>
HsÍ	<i>Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings</i>
Hv	<i>Hungrvaka</i>
Ípb	<i>Ísleifs þátrr byskups</i>
Jb	<i>Jónsbók</i>
Jsh	<i>Jóns saga helga</i>
Jvs	<i>Jómsvíkinga saga</i>
JpH	<i>Sögubáttur af Jóni Halldórssyni biskupi</i>
Kjaln	<i>Kjalnesinga saga</i>
Krm	<i>Kormaks saga</i>
Ks	<i>Konungs skuggsiá</i>
LD	<i>Latinske dokument til norsk historie</i>
Leg	<i>Óláfs saga hins helga [Legendary saga of St Óláfr]</i>
Ljós	<i>Ljósvetninga saga</i>
Lnd	<i>Landnámabók</i>
Lxd	<i>Laxdæla saga</i>
ML	<i>Landslög</i>
Msk	<i>Morkinskinna</i>
NIYR	<i>Norges innskrifter med de yngre Runer</i>
Nj	<i>Njáls saga</i>
NoBa	<i>Norges Ballader</i>
Os	<i>Orkneyinga saga</i>
ÓTO	<i>Saga Óláfs Trygvasonar af Oddr Snorrason munk</i>
Pamph	<i>Pamfiluss saga</i>
Parc	<i>Parcevals saga</i>
PO	<i>Passio et miracula beati Olavi</i>
Prof	<i>Historia de profectione Danorum in Hierosolymam</i>
PS	<i>Postola sögur</i>
Psb	<i>Páls saga byskups</i>
Reykd	<i>Reykdæla saga</i>
RN	<i>Regesta Norvegica</i>
Skj	<i>Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigting</i>
SnE	<i>Edda Snorra Sturlusonar</i>
SÓH	<i>Saga Óláfs konungs hins helga</i>

Str	<i>Strengleikar</i>
Sts	<i>Sturlunga saga</i>
Svarf	<i>Svarfdæla saga</i>
SvR	<i>Róða Sverris</i> [<i>Speech against the bishops / Oratio contra clerum Norvegiæ</i>]
Svs	<i>Sverris saga</i>
TGT	<i>Third Grammatical Treatise</i>
TM	Theodoricus Monachus, <i>Historia de antiquitate regum norwagiensium</i>
Trist	<i>Tristrams saga ok Ísðandar</i>
Vatn	<i>Vatnsdæla saga</i>
Vgl	<i>Víglundar saga</i>
Vgs	<i>Víga-Glúms saga</i>
Vls	<i>Völsunga saga</i>
VsB	<i>Viktors saga ok Blávus</i>
Ysv	<i>Yngvars saga víðförla</i>
ÞsA	<i>Þorláks saga byskups in elzta</i>
ÞsB	<i>Þorláks saga byskups yngri</i>
Þshr	<i>Þórðar saga hreðu</i>
Þshv	<i>Þorsteins saga hvíta</i>
ÞsV	<i>Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar</i>
Qs	<i>Qrvar-Odds saga</i>

* See the Bibliography for editions (and some translations) of these Old Norse primary sources and for additional abbreviations used in bibliographic citations throughout.

Introduction

Love stories are important stories. It is important to understand them: this experience we call love, as ostensibly personal and genuinely impulsive as it is, is also charged with culturally determined symbols, codes, and narrative structures. The history of love is also important because the emotional bond between people is a key to understanding pre-state and early state societies, where political culture and power dynamics were largely shaped by personal relationships. Much has been written about bonds of friendship and matrimonial alliances in medieval society, but few historical studies have taken into account the social significance of love between men and women in the same way. This means analysing love not only as an ideal or as a literary construction, but also as an aspect of politics and social relations. Heterosexual love is particularly interesting in this regard because it can illuminate the relationships between the sexes outside normative sources.

That love is historically significant is not a new insight in and of itself. The understanding of love has its own history; it was not simply lifted as a concept from the deconstruction project of postmodernism. It lies closer to the roots of modernism. The French novelist Stendhal wrote in 1822 that love is a miracle of civilization: ‘Among wild or barbarian peoples one finds only physical love, and that of the coarsest kind.’ Since the height of Romanticism, cultural and literary historians have tried to discern when the existence of truly sublime love ‘began’. Stendhal believed he could pinpoint the birth of love in the twelfth-century court of Champagne, specifically in Andreas Capellanus’s *De Amore*. Later, historians who studied the modern period have emphasized the changes in the eighteenth century that ushered in the modern age, while classical historians look at the development of the Greek city-state or the transition from republic to empire. In contrast to these traditions, this study will not attempt to describe how love was ‘refined’ throughout the Middle Ages, but will focus on how love formed a part of cultural symbols and social relationships in a corner of Europe — Iceland and Norway — in the period before and after the ‘courtly’ love revolution, from the tenth to the early fourteenth centuries.

A key characteristic of our modern understanding of love is its liberating power: love bursts through institutional barriers, melts away prejudices, and triumphs over the oppression of authorities. For many people of today, love's liberation from the confinement of arranged marriages is the greatest advance of the modern age. Nevertheless, stories have been told since antiquity of young people who love one another, but who have been separated because, for whatever reason, the society they were born in would not permit them to be together. While in the eyes of society and their parents they do not belong together, the storyteller and audience seem to have a certain sympathy with their affair of the heart. Love finally triumphs even in ancient love stories: either the lovers are united in life, or they win a moral victory in death. If love was always suppressed in the past, it seems remarkable that so many writers — and audiences — were so interested in it. In the 1990s, several historians have suggested that we have been too hasty in assuming that marriage was just a family affair in the Middle Ages, that the individual had nothing to say in the matter, and that such marriages were always unhappy.¹ This tension between society's organization of relationships through marriage and the individual's power of choice is the central theme of this book and will hopefully provide a useful contrast to work on regions elsewhere in medieval Europe.

Marriage: Promise and Action

The Norwegian provincial legal code known as *Frostapingsløg* has been used in support of the idea that marriages in the Middle Ages were loveless. This code states that 'A woman's father and mother, or her legal guardian, shall determine her marriage'.² However, we also find laws that prescribe the exact opposite: according to canon law, the daughter also had to give her consent for the marriage to be valid. But that was not all; from the mid-twelfth century, the bride's consent alone was also *sufficient* to create a valid marriage. Thus, a verbal understanding between a young

¹ See e.g. Frederik Pedersen, *Marriage Disputes in Medieval England* (London: Hambledon, 2000).

² F XI 2. On Norse laws on marriage in general, see Francis Brandt, *Forelæsninger over den norske rethistorie*, 2 vols (Kristiania: Damm, 1880–83); Konrad von Maurer, *Vorlesnung über Altnordische Rechtsgeschichte*, vol. II: *Über Altnordische Kirchenverfassung und Eherecht* (Leipzig: Deichert'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1908); Vilhjálmur Finsen, 'Fremstilling af den islandske Familieret efter Grágás', *Annaler for nordisk Oldkyndighed og Historie*, 1849, 150–331, and 1850, 121–272; Gudmund Sandvik, 'Ægteskap', *KLNM*, XX (1976), cols 493–95; Sigurður Lindal, 'Ægteskap, Island', *KLNM*, XX (1976), cols 495–501; Jenny M. Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995); Mia Korpiola, 'An Uneasy Harmony: Consummation and Parental Consent in Secular and Canon Law in Medieval Scandinavia', in *Nordic Perspectives on Medieval Canon Law*, ed. by Mia Korpiola, Publications of the Matthias Calonius Society, 2 (Saarijärvi: Matthias Calonius Society, 1999), pp. 125–50.

man and woman was adequate to create a marriage. How did people cope with these contradictions in Norway and Iceland? Did love gain a greater significance in marriage? Or were the canonical laws far removed from reality, formulated by clerical jurists as a theological exercise? Did Church laws and consent remain subject in practice to matrimonial motives of alliances and property?

Historians have long disagreed on how influential canon law was in Norway and Iceland.³ However, we must remember that no matter how greatly canon law influenced legislation in Iceland and Norway, it did not necessarily reflect people's actions and attitudes. The laws did act as parameters for how an individual thought and acted in various situations. But at the same time one may imagine that every person, man or woman, had a certain amount of room for manoeuvrability within these parameters that they could use to achieve the best possible result in a situation where honour, power, or material assets were at stake.⁴ In a legal conflict in the Middle Ages, the advantage was not so much in being 'in the right' in the modern

³ Most scholars have argued that the influence of canon law on marriage was small, especially in the case of consent; see e.g. Roberta Frank, 'Marriage in Twelfth- and Thirteenth-Century Iceland', *Viator*, 4 (1973), 473–84; Birgit Sawyer, *Kvinnor och familj i det forn- og medeltida Skandinavien*, Occasional Papers on Medieval Topics, 6 (Skara: Viktoria, 1992); Jenny M. Jochens, 'Consent in Marriage: Old Norse Law, Life, and Literature', *Scandinavian Studies*, 58 (1986), 142–76; Jochens, "'Með Jákvaði Hennar Sjálfrar': Consent as Signifier in the Old Norse World", in *Consent and Coercion to Sex and Marriage in Ancient and Medieval Societies*, ed. by Angeliki E. Laiou (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1993), pp. 271–89; Inger Holtan, *Ekteskap, frillelevnad og hordom i norsk høgmellomalder* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1996). Some scholars have argued that some women did state their will under certain circumstances, especially when the woman was a widow; see Peter Foote and David M. Wilson, *The Viking Achievement: The Society and Culture of Early Medieval Scandinavia* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1970), p. 113; Loftur Guttormsson, 'Familien', in *Den nordiske verden*, vol. II, ed. by Kirsten Hastrup (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1992), pp. 183–201 (pp. 187–89); Else Mundal, 'Den doble verknaden av kristninga for kvinnene i den norrøne kulturen', *Kvinneforskning*, 23 (1999), 65–78 (p. 73). Recent evaluations of the evidence, however, emphasize the profound impact of canon law in Scandinavia; see Agnes S. Arnórsdóttir, *Konur og vígamenn: Staða kynjanna á Íslandi á 12. og 13. öld*, Sagnfræðirannsóknir, 12 (Reykjavík: Sagnfræðistofnun, Háskóla Íslands, 1995); Agnes S. Arnórsdóttir, 'Two Models of Marriage? Canon Law and Icelandic Marriage Practice in the Late Middle Ages', in *Nordic Perspectives on Medieval Canon Law*, ed. by Korpiola, pp. 79–92; Agnes S. Arnórsdóttir, 'Marriage in the Middle Ages: Canon Law and Nordic Family Relations', in *Norden og Europa i middelalderen*, ed. by Per Ingesman and Thomas Lindkvist, Rapport til Det 24. Nordiske Historikermøde, 1 (Århus: Jysk Selskab for historie, 2001), pp. 174–202; Agnes S. Arnórsdóttir and Thyra Nors, 'Ægteskabet i Norden og det europæiske perspektiv – overvejelser om især danske og islandske normer for ægteskab i 12.–14. århundrede', in *Ægteskap i Norden fra Saxo til i dag*, ed. by Kari Melby, Anu Pylkkänen, and Bente Rosenbeck, Nord, 1999:14 (Copenhagen: Nordisk ministerråd, 1999), pp. 27–51.

⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

sense, but in knowing an expert in the law who could find a loophole or having influential friends who could be called as reliable witnesses.⁵

The people of the Norse Middle Ages deserve to be seen from this agent perspective within their history. By all indications, *actions* were the most important key to an individual's social identity and reputation in Norse society. Other people in the individual's environment were like an audience or judges: what they thought was extremely important, not just for the individual's self-esteem, but also for social integrity and status, especially honour. The visible aspects of a person were important: the body, what one did, the symbols one made use of.⁶ Moreover, personal bonds between people were more important than institutional administrative bodies. In the Norse Middle Ages, men and women were considered close kin with both their mother's and father's families, as well as with their in-laws. Bonds of friendship could nevertheless create stronger feelings of loyalty than kinship bonds. The feeling of obligation to family, in-laws, and friends could easily run counter to one another; in a conflict, one had to choose to support one person and betray others. It is not difficult to imagine the strong emotions such conflicts of loyalty could create in medieval people.

Marriage was one of the most important social institutions in medieval society. A marriage had repercussions for the political, legal, and economic spheres and was therefore a critical transition for both the individual and society. In the process leading up to a marriage, people hoped to gain as much as possible for themselves and their households. The situation has been compared to a game of cards where the players must follow certain rules, for example, norms governing how much material wealth the bride and groom should bring into the marriage and the strength of the alliance the marriage formed. If one had been dealt a bad hand, the risk of playing for stakes higher than one could handle was great. If one had a good hand, one could exploit one's capital to increase social advantages (honour, land, etc.) to the utmost.⁷

⁵ Jesse L. Byock, *Medieval Iceland: Society, Sagas, and Power* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 103, 136; William Ian Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking: Feud, Law, and Society in Saga Iceland* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), pp. 221–57; Arnved Nedkvitne and Per Norseng, *Byen under Eikaberg*, Oslo bys historie, 1 (Oslo: Cappelen, 1991), pp. 236–37.

⁶ Lars Lönnroth, 'Kroppen som själens spegel – Ett motiv i de isländska sagorna', *Lychnos*, 1963–64, 24–61; Sverre Bagge, *Mennesket i middelalderens Norge: Tanker, tro og holdninger* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1998), pp. 231–32; Miller, *Bloodtaking*, pp. 26–34; Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, *Fortælling og ære: Studier i islændingesagaerne* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1995), pp. 187–248.

⁷ Pierre Bourdieu argued that the game usually results in social reproduction. By this he meant that marriages, by virtue of certain economic and cultural mechanisms, upheld social differences; see his 'Marriage Strategies as Strategies of Social Reproduction', in *Family and Society: Selections from the Annales*, ed. by Robert Forster and Orest Ranum (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), pp. 117–44 (p. 120): 'there are very strong reasons for postulating that marriage was not based on obedience to any ideal rule but came about as the

To a certain degree, an individual could take advantage of laws, social networks, and cultural symbols for his own interests, rational or emotional. It is the modes of thought behind individuals' actions and choices that must be revealed if we are to understand the social significance of love.

It should be noted in using the agent perspective that both men and women are to be considered as agents. Women could inherit and own property, and as such were an important economic resource in the Norse Middle Ages. As wives, women also stood between their old and new families, and it was not always clear in times of conflict whom they would support. This means that we must consider women's opportunities of promoting their own will outside the legal framework, with their own ambitions, strategies, and choices of action. Women's basic point of view may have been different from men's, but not all women necessarily shared the same interests and strategies.⁸

Love: Rationality and Emotions

Norse literature is (in contrast to what many believe) full of love stories; but how does one write history from these love stories? It may be obvious to write a history of ideas about love as an idea. However, a historian must also aim to understand how love related to the social and cultural contexts in which these stories were told.

end result of a strategy which, availing itself of strongly interiorized principles of a particular tradition, was able to reproduce in a manner more subconscious than conscious any one of the typical solutions explicitly contained in that tradition.' The game, the rules, and the rewards for the agents can change over time. Bourdieu, however, was not especially interested in historical processes; see e.g. William H. Sewell, Jr, 'A Theory of Structure: Duality, Agency, and Transformation', *American Journal of Sociology*, 98 (1992), 1–29 (pp. 16–21).

⁸ The status of women in Old Norse society is much discussed. On the one hand, there are scholars who argue that women had a weak position, e.g. Jochens, *Women*. Others are more inclined to put more weight on the relative strong position of women in the sagas, e.g. Carol J. Clover, 'Hildigunnr's Lament', in *Structure and Meaning in Old Norse Literature: New Approaches to Textual Analysis and Literary Criticism*, ed. by John Lindow, Lars Lönnroth, and Gerd Wolfgang Weber, The Viking Collection, 3 (Odense: Odense University Press, 1986), pp. 141–83; Clover, 'Maiden Warriors and Other Sons', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 85 (1986), 35–49; Clover, 'The Politics of Scarcity: Notes on the Sex Ratio in Early Scandinavia', *Scandinavian Studies*, 60 (1988), 147–88; Miller, *Bloodtaking*, pp. 212–13; Else Mundal, 'The Position of Women in Old Norse Society and the Basis for their Power', *Nora: Nordic Journal for Women's Studies*, 1 (1994), 3–11. The trend in studies on medieval women has tended to go from an emphasis on informal power to a focus on how women were subtly constructed as the weaker sex after all; see Elisabeth van Houts, 'The State of Research: Women in Medieval History and Literature', *Journal of Medieval History*, 20 (1994), 277–92; Miri Rubin, 'A Decade of Studying Medieval Women, 1987–1997', *History Workshop Journal*, 46 (1998), 213–39.

It can be difficult enough to put our own feelings into words; and yet as historians, we seek to understand the feelings of people long dead. But to be able to speak rationally about the relationship between culture and people's innermost feelings, sociologists, anthropologists, and psychologists make a distinction between 'feelings' and 'emotions'.⁹ 'Feelings' are physical, non-cognitive reactions: for example, feeling hungry or feeling pain in your finger. 'Emotions' are connected to people's cognitive perception of their feelings. Pain can have many causes which, depending on the context, can lead to different emotions in the subject. A blow to the arm can lead to anger, desire for revenge, disappointment, or fear. If the recipient of the blow becomes angry, this emotion could generate emotions in the one who delivered the blow, for example, remorse, malicious pleasure, superiority — all depending on what the situation and the subject's framework of interpretation indicate. An emotion is thus a communicative act, that is, an understanding and expression of feelings that arise within a shared cultural framework of understanding. Norms and values can serve as guidelines for when it is appropriate to show emotion and in what way, whether at a funeral or a wedding. It is thus the interpretation of feelings based on unconscious modes of thought and the communication aspect proceeding from it through cultural codes that constitutes an emotion. Interpreted in this way, emotions are culturally and historically determined.

In this study, love is regarded as an emotion. It may feel good to be in love; this feeling would be part of love as an emotion. Nevertheless, love has no social significance until it is expressed; it leads to actions in connection with social relationships between people. Love understood as an emotion is thus an action that involves at least two people. How these actions are carried out and perceived depends on the cultural context in which the actions take place. The individual's perception of his or

⁹ The following section is based on several works: Michelle Z. Rosaldo, 'Toward an Anthropology of Self and Feeling', in *Culture Theory: Essays on Mind, Self, and Emotion*, ed. by Richard A. Shweder and Robert A. Levine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 137–57; James R. Averill, 'The Social Construction of Emotion: With Special Reference to Love', in *The Social Construction of the Person*, ed. by Kenneth J. Gergen and Keith E. Davis (New York: Springer, 1985), pp. 89–109; Claire Armon-Jones, 'The Thesis of Constructionism', in *The Social Construction of Emotions*, ed. by Ron Harré (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), pp. 32–56; Peter N. Stearns and Carol Z. Stearns, 'Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards', *American Historical Review*, 90 (1985), 813–36; Catherine Lutz and Geoffrey M. White, 'The Anthropology of Emotions', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 15 (1986), 405–36; Peggy A. Thoits, 'The Sociology of Emotions', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 15 (1989), 317–42; Batja Mesquita and Nico H. Frijda, 'Cultural Variations in Emotions: A Review', *Psychological Bulletin*, 112 (1992), 179–204. On emotions in Old Norse society, see now William Ian Miller, 'Emotions and the Sagas', in *From Sagas to Society: Comparative Approaches to Early Iceland*, ed. by Gisli Pálsson (Enfield Lock: Hisarlik 1992), pp. 89–109; Ellisif Gjestland, 'Emosjoner i sagaen? En undersøkelse av sorg, sinne og kjærlighet' (unpublished master's thesis, University of Bergen, 1995); Marlen Strand Ferrer, 'Middelaldermenneskets emosjonelle atferd: Et uttrykk for en kompleks psykologi', *Historisk tidsskrift*, 80 (2001), 147–72.

her own feelings for the opposite sex has been surrounded by different and changing ideas, notions, values, ideals, and norms. If we want to get close to medieval people's conception of love, we must also familiarize ourselves with the most important elements in their world of meaning.

The theory of emotion illuminates a few important points historians need to bear in mind. First, social strategies and feelings are not mutually exclusive. An example: one is hardly predetermined to love one particular person, but it is remarkable how often, even in today's society, people end up with a mate from the same social stratum. Similar upbringing, interests, tastes, and clothing styles can point to certain preferences in marriage. Two people with widely different backgrounds will therefore seldom seek each other out or get on well together.¹⁰ The deep divide between reason and feelings is regarded by sociologists as a product of the construction of a public, political, rational, and masculine space in opposition to the private, emotional, and feminine home atmosphere.

¹⁰ Cf. Bourdieu, 'Marriage Strategies', p. 140: 'a happy love, that is, a socially approved and therefore success-bound love, was the same thing as that *amor fati* — love of one's own social destiny, which brings together socially compatible partners by way of a free choice that is unpredictable and arbitrary in appearance only.' See also William Goode, 'The Theoretical Importance of Love', *American Sociological Review*, 24 (1959), 38–47, and Françoise Zonabend, 'An Anthropological Perspective on Kinship and the Family', in *A History of the Family*, vol. 1: *Distant Worlds, Ancient Worlds*, ed. by André Burguière and others (Oxford: Polity Press, 1996), pp. 8–68, on social patterns for the choice of marriage partners. In the 1970s, most studies emphasized that the canon law on consent did not imply 'warm' marriages in the Middle Ages; see e.g. Philippe Ariès, 'Love in Married Life', in *Western Sexuality: Practice and Precept in Past and Present Times*, ed. by Philippe Ariès and André Bejin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 130–39; Edward Shorter, *The Making of the Modern Family* (London: Collins, 1976); Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500–1800* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1977); Joan W. Scott, 'History of the Family as an Affective Unit', *Social History*, 4 (1979), 509–16; Michael Anderson, *Approaches to the History of the Western Family, 1500–1914* (London: Macmillan, 1980); Alan Macfarlane, *Marriage and Love in England: Modes of Reproduction 1300–1840* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986). From the 1980s, most scholars abandoned the great diachronic history of the modern loving couple and studied smaller social units instead, in which love occasionally could find its place also in rural society; cf. Tamara K. Hareven, 'Family History at the Crossroads', *Journal of Family History*, 12 (1987), ix–xxii; Martine Segalen, *Historical Anthropology of the Family* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 108–31. See also David Herlihy 'The Family and Religious Ideologies in Medieval Europe', *Journal of Family History*, 12 (1987), 3–17; Hans Medick and David Warren Sabean, 'Interest and Emotion in Family and Kinship Studies: A Critique of Social History and Anthropology', in *Interest and Emotion: Essays on the Study of Family and Kinship*, ed. by Hans Medick and David W. Sabean (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 9–27; Trevor Dean and Kate Lowe, 'Introduction: Issues in the History of Marriage', in *Marriage in Italy, 1300–1650*, ed. by Trevor Dean and Kate J. P. Lowe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 1–21, for more nuanced discussions on the relationship between strategies and emotions in relation to marriage.

Secondly, we must be sceptical of the assumption that when young people are permitted to choose their own spouses, that the choice is automatically motivated by 'romantic love'.¹¹ In this context one is also well advised to avoid the dichotomy between women's consent and rational choice. Anthropological research into this area has promoted a deconstruction of the modern Western polarization between emotionality/femininity on the one hand and rationality/masculinity on the other.¹²

Thirdly, the distinction between instinct-driven 'sexuality' and spiritually driven 'love' must not be considered as universally acknowledged. The division is probably a product of our Western modes of thought, founded on the classical distinction between body and soul. The degree to which 'love' has universal, biologically determined characteristics emanating from the reproductive instinct is a matter outside the scope of this study.¹³ The point for the human love story is that the same physical reactions that take place when a man or woman 'falls in love with' or is 'sexually attracted to' someone can be perceived in very different ways when it is filtered through our culturally determined preconceptions. The question then is how such cultural categories make their mark on one's understanding and experience of the same biological functions.

The love stories we will encounter in the Norse sources were intertwined with cultural categories like honour and shame, choice and destiny, happiness and tragedy, the relationship between the human and the divine, magnates and farmers, farmers and slaves, women and men. If the love stories change in fundamental ways, we can also assume that the attitudes behind them did as well. But what could bring change to mentalities surrounding love?

Love in Flux: State and Church

Having established that love as an emotion can vary with the culture, the next question becomes 'What cultural and social changes might lead to a shift in the

¹¹ André Burguière, 'The Formation of the Couple', *Journal of Family History*, 12 (1987), 39–53. See also Jacqueline Murray, 'Individualism and Consensual Marriage: Some Evidence from Medieval England', in *Women, Marriage and Family in Medieval Christendom: Essays in Memory of Michael M. Sheehan, C.S.B.*, ed. by Constance M. Rousseau and Joel T. Rosenthal, *Studies in Medieval Culture*, 37 (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1998), pp. 121–51.

¹² See especially Catherine Lutz, *Unnatural Emotions: Everyday Sentiments on a Micronesian Atoll and their Challenge to Western Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), pp. 53–80. This does not mean that this construction has been of no importance in Western culture; see Annick Prieur, 'Forholdet mellom kjønn og klasse med utgangspunkt i Bourdieus sosiologi', *Sosiologisk tidsskrift*, 6 (1998), 131–47.

¹³ For a discussion along these lines, see Laura Betzig, 'Medieval Monogamy', *Journal of Family History*, 20 (1995), 181–216.

customs, practices, thoughts, and attitudes surrounding love?’ The obvious answer is to look at two processes of change that took place in both Norway and Iceland in the period leading up to 1350: the development of a strong Church organization and the centralization of power around the king. It is not without cause that general works about this period in Norway are given titles like *Consolidation of the Kingdom and Christianization*, *Norway Becomes a Nation*, or *Under Church and Crown*.

In 1939, the sociologist Norbert Elias launched a theory about the development of courtly love in the context of the development of the state in the Middle Ages.¹⁴ One of the consequences of a centralization of power was that the king gained a monopoly on the use of violence. The aristocracy’s loss of this right created a problem of legitimacy. The king’s professional soldiers and the peasants they mobilized for battle were the ones who took part in war, and only the king’s men could carry out corporal punishment. At the same time, European society was becoming ever more differentiated and complex. Town dwellers and the king’s men had, in actuality, a more important function and access to greater resources than the old aristocracy. Nevertheless, it was in the king’s interests to bind the old warrior class to his court. At court, exercising self-control and participating in intrigues were more important than being a spontaneous fighter. Thus the old aristocracy was ‘disarmed’ by the king, but received high social status in return. Love, in the sense of sublimated and refined sexuality, was a by-product of the need of the aristocracy to distinguish themselves from other social groups through self-control and refined behaviour. Elias clearly shows here that he was influenced by Freud’s psychoanalytical theories; the state transformed societal norms into a sort of ‘superego’ that made the ego control the libido.¹⁵

The relationship between husband and wife developed in a similar way. In the early Middle Ages, Elias argues, women were subject to their husbands’ sexual urges and violent tendencies. Later, as the families of the nobility lost their position as autonomous powers, the significance of kinship structure lessened. The close bonds of the nuclear family received greater emphasis. Similarity between the sexes in love and marriage is thus a characteristic of a society with a certain degree of state development.¹⁶

¹⁴ The following section is primarily based on ‘Towards a Theory of Civilizing Processes’, in Norbert Elias, *The Civilization Process* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), pp. 443–524.

¹⁵ The connection between courtly love and state formation is discussed in ‘On the Socio-genesis of Minnesang and Courtly Forms of Conduct’, in Elias, *Civilization Process*, pp. 314–34.

¹⁶ Elias later used his theory on late republic and early imperial Rome, where he claimed that women gained power in more complicated societies; see Norbert Elias, ‘The Changing Balance of Power between the Sexes – a Process-Sociological Study: The Example of the Ancient Roman State’, *Theory, Culture and Society*, 4 (1987), 287–316. Historians have confirmed that changes did indeed occur at this time concerning the ideals of love in married life, but disagree on when and why this happened; see Paul Veyne, ‘L’amour et la famille sous le Haut-Empire romain’, *Annales ESC*, 33 (1978), 35–63; Suzanne Dixon, ‘The Sentimental Ideal of the Roman Family’, in *Marriage, Divorce, and Children in Ancient Rome*, ed. by

Nevertheless, the state at the end of the Middle Ages was still dependent on the family as a mediator of status and property advantages. Therefore, it was in the state's interest for parents to have control over their children's marriages. The need for legitimacy made it necessary for the young, especially women, to confine their sexual urges within marriage. It was not until the state became so strong that it was no longer dependent on family control that marriage could be liberated and young people allowed to choose their own partners in life.¹⁷

There are many weaknesses in Elias's theory. It is very easy to demonstrate that medieval people cannot be dismissed as 'primitive' and 'spontaneous', as Elias did. Sverre Bagge has pointed out that instead, pre-state and state societies had different types of rationalities. Nor were medieval people devoid of norms. They had other, for us often strange, norms with regard to the use of violence, etc.¹⁸ A development from medieval 'nature' to the 'culture' of the early modern period — or from 'living by one's sexual urges' to 'ennobled love' — must, accordingly, be understood rather as the transition from one type of culture and conception of love to another. We must therefore be cautious of assuming that medieval people liked more violence and sex because of a lack of central power, but we must also be open to the idea that the honour-driven, household-based society of the Norse Middle Ages may have contributed to constructing the types of emotions and behaviour patterns Elias calls 'sexual aggressivity'.¹⁹ These reservations must also be seen in relation to the different ways the development of the state affected men and women. Women were hardly passive victims in gender relations, as Elias seems to believe. The effect of state development on women's attitudes to love will therefore also be an important theme of this book.

Beryl Rawson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp. 99–113; Richard Saller, 'The Social Dynamics of Consent to Marriage and Sexual Relations: The Evidence of Roman Comedy', in *Consent and Coercion*, ed. by Laiou, pp. 83–104; cf. also JoAnn McNamara and Suzanne F. Wemple, 'The Power of Women through the Family in Medieval Europe, 500–1100', in *Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Mary Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988), pp. 83–101, on changes in women's right to inheritance and property in early medieval Europe.

¹⁷ Elias, *Civilization Process*, pp. 150–52 and 324–28; on recent applications of Elias's theory on marriage, see Michael Schröter, 'Marriage', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 4 (1987), 317–22, and Pieter Spierenburg, *The Broken Spell: A Cultural and Anthropological History of Preindustrial Europe* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991).

¹⁸ Cf. Bagge, *Mennesket*, pp. 225–32.

¹⁹ For a critical assessment of Elias's view of violence, see Erling Sandmo, *Voldssamfunnets undergang: Om disiplineringen av Norge på 1600-tallet* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1999). Sandmo questions the very concept of 'violence' in Elias; after all, it was the state that defined what 'violence' consisted of, and hence constructed a category through which leaders could legitimate their power.

Despite its weaknesses, Elias's theory has proved useful as an explanatory model. In Norway, it has been used to explain a growing disapproval of violence in the course of the thirteenth century, in both Norway and Iceland.²⁰ Arnved Nedkvitne has described how the individual in the Norse Middle Ages was punished according to a more fixed and predictable justice system which was also reinforced by new religious concepts of punishment in the next world. The introduction of Christianity around the year 1000 was, in itself, less significant for this development than the systematization and individualization of the Church's dogmas in the two succeeding centuries.²¹ In this study, therefore, the development of the state is regarded as an explanatory model that helps historians ask interesting questions about Norse source material without associating themselves too closely with Elias's Freudian perspective.²²

As Nedkvitne has noted, one of the greatest holes in Elias's theory is that he completely overlooks religious ideas as an explanatory factor. C. Stephen Jaeger has gone to different sources than those Elias used to trace the rise of ideals regarding self-control and chivalry.²³ He believes that courtly ideals preceded the expansion of state power and aristocratic courtly culture. It was first and foremost the clerics, particularly those connected with the courts of kings and bishops, who developed new norms for conduct. The clerics were a new social group in the Middle Ages who lived among warriors but at the same time were defined as separate from the warrior life. Thus, they needed another type of distinguishing behaviour. In the twelfth

²⁰ Johan Anton Rønneberg Rygg, 'Fra spontanitet og voldsglede til selvkontroll og avsky for vold? En mentalitetshistorisk studie i voldsforståelse på det førstetlige Island og i det statlige Norge, ca. 1180–1300' (unpublished master's thesis, University of Oslo, 1997); see also Arnved Nedkvitne and Johan Anton R. Rygg, 'Siviliseringsprosessen – en modell for middelalderforskere?', in *Norbert Elias: En sosiolog for historikere?*, ed. by Tor Egil Førland, Tid og Tanke, 1 (Oslo: Department of History, University of Oslo, 1997), pp. 19–30.

²¹ Arnved Nedkvitne, *Møtet med døden i norrøn middelalder: En mentalitetshistorisk studie* (Oslo: Cappelen, 1997).

²² French historians have seen a close link between courtly love and feudal society; e.g. Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society* (London: Routledge, 1961), pp. 309–10; Georges Duby, *The Knight, the Lady, and the Priest: The Making of Modern Marriage in Medieval France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 39–40, 282–84; Duby, 'The Courtly Model', in *Silences of the Middle Ages*, ed. by Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, *A History of Women*, 2 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 250–66; Duby, *Love and Marriage in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), pp. 56–63. However, the extent and even existence of the feudal revolution in the eleventh century, or rather a change in the character of sources, is now the subject of heated debate.

²³ C. Stephen Jaeger, *The Origins of Courtliness: Civilizing Trends and the Formation of Courtly Ideals 939–1210* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), pp. 101–10, 211–13; Jaeger, 'Courtliness and Social Change', in *Cultures of Power: Lordship, Status, and Process in Twelfth-Century Europe*, ed. by Thomas N. Bisson (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1995), pp. 287–309; Jaeger, *Ennobling Love: In Search of a Lost Sensibility* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999).

century, court clerics had the responsibility of training young men in the prince's circle. One of the means of changing the warrior nobility's conduct was through moral love stories. Many of the characteristics of figures in the romances are derived from clerical court ideals, Jaeger asserts. Heroes are no longer supposed to fight blindly with carnage and death as their only aim, but fight a moral fight for all of Christendom. Courtly love was therefore a clerical, civilizing ideal that was used at the courts of Europe to raise up young knights to more peaceful warrior norms.

The growing interest in love in the Middle Ages has also been seen in connection with the dawn of individualism. Interest was increasingly focused on a knowledge of what was going on within one's self. Subjective liability replaced collective responsibility. From the twelfth century, the Church began to put more emphasis on inward, personal piety, and the individual became responsible for his own salvation through his works. Such new thoughts and concepts about the individual also had consequences for the understanding of love.²⁴ For the troubadours, it is not primarily the object of love who occupied the centre, but the emotions she created within one's heart. As the Virgin Mary was called upon to help young monks work toward moral perfection, the praise of courtly and virtuous women helped young men learn courtly manners and 'true love'. Chrétien de Troyes's romances from the late twelfth century show an interest in what happens in a man's spiritual life when he falls in love. The heroes' lives are made difficult, not smooth and easy. The development of a love affair, its significance for self-perception, and the feeling of freedom of choice changed in step with the increasing latitude the individual enjoyed in society. Heroic warriors who did visible deeds on the battlefield gave way in literature to romantic, reflective knights.²⁵

²⁴ The love affair between Abelard and Heloise is often used as an example of this; see Colin Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual, 1050–1200*, Medieval Academy Reprints for Teaching, 19 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), pp. 111–16; Roy F. Baumeister, 'How the Self Became a Problem: A Psychological Review of Historical Research', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 52 (1987), 163–76; Sverre Bagge, 'The Autobiography of Abelard and Medieval Individualism', *Journal of Medieval History*, 19 (1993), 327–50; Aaron Gurevich, *The Origins of European Individualism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), pp. 136–55; Constant Mews, *The Lost Love Letters of Heloise and Abelard: Perceptions of Dialogue in Twelfth-Century France* (New York: Palgrave, 1999).

²⁵ R. W. Southern, *The Making of the Middle Ages* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953); Morris, *Discovery*, pp. 107–20; John F. Benton, 'Consciousness of Self and Perceptions of Individuality', in *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century*, ed. by Robert L. Benson and Giles Constable (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), pp. 263–95; Gurevich, *Origins*, pp. 185–93. Cf. Robert Hanning, *The Individual in Twelfth-Century Romance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), p. 3: '[The] acceptance of life as an adventure [. . .] leads the knight into situations which challenge his acceptance of social values and therefore offer an alternative to an identity defined by forces outside himself. The main form taken by that alternative is the experience of love, which produces within the romance hero a pure vision of happiness and fulfilment, tied to his obtaining the beloved permanently.'

The two different explanations of changes in the understanding of love during the High Middle Ages can also shed light on Norse culture. The period from about 1150 to 1300 was characterized by thoroughgoing societal changes in both Norway and Iceland. In 1152/3, a Norwegian archbishopric was established at Niðaróss (modern Trondheim), which also presided over the two Icelandic bishoprics. In 1163/4, a Norwegian king was crowned and anointed by the archbishop for the first time: the king was no longer regarded as a mere warrior chieftain, but also as God's anointed. The laws were collected and systematized despite, or perhaps because of, the conflict between the king and the Church regarding jurisdiction and spheres of power. An aristocracy which was increasingly bound to the king's *hirð*, or bodyguard, and to service at court participated in bureaucracy as well as wars. The clerics were a growing social group during the thirteenth century, whether in local society, Norwegian towns, or the circles of the aristocracy and the Norwegian king. Both the aristocracy and the clerics filled new functions and may have felt the need for a new type of identity as their continental counterparts did. The Old Norse source material gives us the opportunity to examine love's transformations in the Middle Ages from a Northern perspective.

Old Norse Literature as Historical Sources

Although documents so valuable to social historians, such as wills and court records, are preserved in some quantity only from the fourteenth century onwards, source material from early and high medieval Iceland and Norway is fortunately far from scarce. Sagas of kings, Icelandic bishops, Icelandic chieftains and farmers; legends, laws, diplomas, sermons, Eddic and skaldic poems — all these source categories will be brought into this study. Every genre has its special problems for the historian, something we will return to later. However, the sagas of Icelanders — thirteenth-century narratives written about famous Icelandic families from the tenth century — are problematic as historical sources and merit further discussion here.²⁶

²⁶ There are four different views on the effect of the consent doctrine of canon law, in which the view on the sagas of Icelanders as historical sources is important for the conclusion. (1) The few cases of consent in the sagas indicate that the Church had little effect on marriage practices; cf. Frank, 'Marriage'. (2) Consent in the sagas of Icelanders is an anachronism put there by clerical authors, but the effect in real society was rather marginal; see Jenny M. Jochens, 'The Church and Sexuality in Medieval Iceland', *Journal of Medieval History*, 6 (1980), 377–92; Jochens, 'The Medieval Icelandic Heroine: Fact or Fiction?', *Viator*, 17 (1986), 35–50; Jochens, 'Consent'; Jochens, "'Með Jákvaði'"; Jochens, *Women*; Judith Jesch, *Women in the Viking Age* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1991). (3) The sagas include stories of women's consent to marriage in fiction to show that the effect could be disastrous for society, that is, an aristocratic *opposition* to the doctrine of consent; see Birgit Sawyer and Peter Sawyer, *Medieval Scandinavia: From Conversion to Reformation, circa 800–1500*, The Nordic Series, 17 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), pp. 174–78. (4) Stories

The problem is simply that the sagas of Icelanders contain many phenomena that we do not find in sagas set in the thirteenth century. Nevertheless, we cannot assume that such phenomena are necessarily tenth-century traditions. After all, these sagas were literary works written in the thirteenth century. Since 1970, various attempts have been made to tackle this source problem.²⁷ For the sake of simplicity we can distinguish four approaches to the sagas of Icelanders:

- 1) The sagas of Icelanders are used as sources for the time they describe, that is, the tenth century. Historians can, for example, try to separate out anachronistic elements, such as material influenced by Christian ideals. The rest is then regarded as having its roots in the tenth century.²⁸
- 2) The sagas of Icelanders are used as sources for general societal mechanisms in pre-state Norse society from the tenth century to the beginning of the thirteenth. For example, it is highly improbable that saga authors took the principle of kinship or gift exchange from their own (collective) imagination.²⁹ This approach may be called historical anthropology.
- 3) Literary anthropology sees the sagas set in the tenth century as the Icelanders' construction of their own past. Through the sagas, Icelanders created their

of consent in the sagas of Icelanders indicate that the doctrine of consent really became a part of the consciousness of Icelanders in the thirteenth century; see Sveinbjörn Rafnsson, 'Þorláksskriftir og hjúskapur á 12. og 13. öld', *Saga*, 20 (1982), 114–29; Sveinbjörn Rafnsson, 'Forn hrossareiðalög og heimildir þeira', *Saga*, 28 (1990), 131–48.

²⁷ Overviews of the discussion include Carol J. Clover, 'Icelandic Family Sagas (Islendingasögur)', in *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide*, ed. by Carol J. Clover and John Lindow, *Islandica*, 45 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 239–315; Vésteinn Ólason, 'Norrøn litteratur som historisk kildemateriale', in *Kilderne til den tidlige middelalders historie*, ed. by Gunnar Karlsson, *Rapporter til den XX nordiske historikerkongres*, 1 (Reykjavik: Sagnfræðistofnum Háskóla Íslands, 1987), pp. 30–47; Vésteinn Ólason, 'Islendingesögur', in *MSE*, pp. 333–36.

²⁸ Foote and Wilson, *Viking Achievement*, pp. xxiii–xxv; Jenny M. Jochens, 'The Illicit Love Visit: An Archaeology of Old Norse Sexuality', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 1 (1991), 357–92; Jochens, *Women*; Nedkvitne, *Møtet med døden*, p. 16. In Meulengracht Sørensen, *Fortælling*, pp. 291–327, there is an overview of the many attempts in this direction.

²⁹ Victor W. Turner, 'An Anthropological Approach to the Icelandic Saga', in *The Translation of Culture: Essays to E. E. Evans Pritchard*, ed. by T. O. Beidelman (London: Tavistock, 1971), pp. 349–74; Byock, *Medieval Iceland*, pp. 36–50; Miller, *Bloodtaking*, pp. 44–50; Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, *Chieftains and Power in the Icelandic Commonwealth*, The Viking Collection, 12 (Odense: Odense University Press, 1999), pp. 26–30. This perspective is used in relation to marriage in Frank, 'Marriage'; Loftur Guttormsson, 'Familien'; and to the position of women in pre-state society in general in Mundal, 'Position'; Clover, 'Hildigunnr's Lament'; Miller, *Bloodtaking*, pp. 212–13; Sverre Bagge, 'Mann og kvinne i *Heimskringla*', in *Fokus på kvinner i middelalderkilder*, ed. by Berit J. Sellevold, Else Mundal, and Gro Steinsland (Skara: Viktoria, 1992), pp. 8–31.

identity and history and, in doing so, their own ‘saga world’. Since this world did not, in the strictest sense, exist outside the texts, the sagas cannot be used as direct *historical*-anthropological sources. This approach reminds historians that the sagas must be subjected to literary analyses before they can be used as historical sources.³⁰

- 4) One way historians can use the sagas as texts is to focus on the *ideologies* in these sagas. That women in certain instances give their consent before their marriages can be explained as an instance of propaganda for the Church’s doctrine of consent.³¹ Another way is to see the description of society in those sagas as coloured by the saga writer’s general view of society and history — his unconscious mentalities. In order for such an analysis to say anything about mentalities more generally, each individual saga must be compared to other sagas from the same period.³²

My approach to the sagas will bear the most resemblance to the last of these four, which focuses first and foremost on the sagas as documents of the time they were written. My basic assumption is as follows: Norse society consisted of people. People functioned as agents within that society. These agents carried out actions. Their actions were based on founded or unfounded choices. A number of different elements might lie behind those choices: for example, a rational wish for power or money; strong emotions; socialized norms; unconscious attitudes and values; or threats and coercion. Agents, therefore, did not act independently of norms and societal structure, nor were their actions predetermined by them. It was more a case of an inclination to common behavioural patterns, attitudes, and norms that sprang

³⁰ Meulengracht Sørensen, *Fortælling*; cf. Gerd Wolfgang Weber, ‘Irreligiosität und Heldenzeitalter: Zum Mythencharakter der altisländischen Literatur’, in *Specvlvm Norrænum: Norse Studies in Memory of Gabriel Turville-Petre*, ed. by Ursula Dronke and others (Odense: Odense University Press, 1981), pp. 474–505; Kirsten Hastrup, *Culture and History in Medieval Iceland: An Anthropological Analysis of Structure and Change* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), pp. 245–46; Anne Heinrichs, ‘Annat er vart eðli: The Type of the Prepatrarchal Woman in Old Norse Literature’, in *Structure and Meaning in Old Norse Literature*, ed. by Lindow, Lönnroth, and Weber, pp. 110–40; Margaret Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes: Old Norse Myths in Medieval Northern Society*, vol. II: *The Reception of Norse Myths in Medieval Iceland*, The Viking Collection, 10 (Odense: Odense University Press, 1998). On this perspective in relation to marriage, see Katrina Burge, ‘Cultural Themes at the Wedding Feast in the Family Sagas’, in *The Treasures of the Elder Tongue: Fifty Years of Old Norse in Melbourne*, ed. by Katrina Burge (Melbourne: University of Melbourne, 1994), pp. 55–69; Jana K. Schulman, ‘Make Me a Match: Motifs of Betrothal in the Sagas of the Icelanders’, *Scandinavian Studies*, 69 (1997), 296–321.

³¹ Jenny Jochens argues in several studies that women goading their men to revenge is a literary motif with a negative moral tone; it is women who make men kill each other.

³² Sverre Bagge, *Society and Politics in Snorri Sturluson’s Heimskringla* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); cf. Rygg, ‘Fra spontanitet’, pp. 15–20.

from every individual's upbringing and membership in a household or a certain social group. Individuals within some groups — which for the sake of simplicity we will call clerics, the aristocracy, *hirð*-men, etc. — could have had many similarities in their actions and attitudes in relation to other groups. Men within ecclesiastical institutions would not have been concerned with the same dilemmas or tensions as secular magnates with regard to the saga characters' love and choices. Such tensions in literature and the development of love as a literary theme should tell us something about the saga writers' conscious and unconscious attitudes to love and the relationships of marriage partners, which may also have been representative of their differing social circles and audiences.

We can further assume that the portrayals of characters' actions and choices in relation to love and marriage in the sagas lay within what Norse saga audiences believed was possible and perhaps natural. The problems that couples in love encountered in literature must have struck a chord with the people who read it. If the chord changed, this must also have affected a literary theme like love. Chronological changes in the development of love as a literary theme, and the milieus to which we can trace them, will bring us closer to the development of the Norse people's mentality of love and the social processes through which the changes took place. Therefore, the most insightful method of approach for my purpose will be a literary analysis of every single saga of Icelanders as its own 'saga universe' where the genre does not dictate the content, but rather gives the writer the opportunity to explore the nature of love, whether problematic or beneficial.³³ This method will avoid the widespread view that the sagas of Icelanders are all expressions of a single saga world, or that Norse society stood still between the tenth and thirteenth centuries.

There are two general problems associated with this approach. First, the dating of the sagas of Icelanders is uncertain. In this respect I will rely on the relatively certain dating of a few central sagas.³⁴ The other is that most sagas are only preserved in

³³ Christopher N. L. Brooke, *The Medieval Idea of Marriage* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) has a similar approach to the courtly romances. The relevance and meaning of genre in Old Norse literature has been hotly debated. For an overview, see Clover, 'Icelandic Family Sagas', pp. 275–78. An important aspect of genre is the social and spatial setting of the saga. In this way, the same saga could transgress genres, something that could have importance for the evaluation of the agents and their actions; see Marianne E. Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance in Medieval Iceland*, *Islandica*, 46 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990); Ármann Jakobsson, 'Le Roi Chevalier: The Royal Ideology and Genre of *Hrólfs saga kraka*', *Scandinavian Studies*, 71 (1999), 139–66; Torfi H. Tulinius, 'The Matter of the North: Fiction and Uncertain Identities in Thirteenth-Century Iceland', in *Old Icelandic Literature and Society*, ed. by Margaret Clunies Ross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 242–65.

³⁴ Dating the sagas of Icelanders is a notoriously difficult task, and revisions of conventional dates often crop up. For updated discussions, see the entries in *MSE* and Vésteinn Ólason, 'Íslendingasögur og þættir', in *Íslensk bókmenntasaga*, vol. II, ed. by Böðvar Guðmundsson and others (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 1993), pp. 25–163. Individual sagas are

manuscripts from the late Middle Ages. Those who copied down the sagas may have been tempted to shape the action according to their own views on a theme like love. A few sagas are preserved in different forms, and it is possible that they reflect more of the copyist than of the original version.³⁵ A safety net for source problems relating to the sagas of Icelanders is comparison with other materials. This study provides a systematic examination of the breadth of Norse source material: laws, diplomas, poetry, sagas of Icelanders, bishops' sagas, kings' sagas, and contemporary sagas.

The book is divided into three chronological sections. Chapters 2 and 3 deal with the period from the Viking Age to the twelfth century. Sources used in these chapters are primarily Eddic and skaldic poems. Chapters 4 to 7 look at the period from about 1150 to 1230. It was in this period that the archbishopric was established, the Norwegian kingdom was developing, the doctrine of consent was introduced, and Norwegians and Icelanders first became acquainted with chivalric culture. Chapters 8 and 9 discuss the effects of canon law and courtly culture in the thirteenth century through to the late Middle Ages.

also discussed in Jónas Kristjánsson, *Eddas and Sagas: Iceland's Medieval Literature*, 3rd edn (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1997).

³⁵ Manuscript studies are given more attention in literary studies of the sagas; concerning what both the compilation of certain sagas and the illustrations can tell us, see Stephen Norman Tranter, *Sturlunga Saga: The Role of the Creative Compiler*, European University Studies, Series I, German Language and Literature, 941 (Frankfurt a.M.: Lang, 1987); Stephen A. Mitchell, *Heroic Sagas and Ballads* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991); Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes*, vol. II.

Divine Love and Heroic Consent

In this chapter, I would like to examine the significance of love and women's will in the realm of gods and heroes. The dating of the mythological and heroic poems is a topic of intense discussion; some regard the poems as genuine expressions of pagan ideas and attitudes, while others believe that the Eddic poems reveal more about the conceptions of Scandinavians of the High Middle Ages. I would like to sidestep this debate for the moment and focus primarily on the social contexts in which the love stories are set. Whereas the mythological world incorporated a society divided into three hierarchical groups, action in the heroic poems is based on the social equality of the characters. My theory is that these social contexts are significant for how love and will were portrayed, and that this informed how real people in corresponding social contexts understood their own feelings.

Love in the Mythological World

Dating and Themes of the Mythological Poems

Analysing the love stories of mythological poetry is not without its problems. Traditionally, encounters between men and women in Norse mythology have been interpreted as unions of natural forces. In an influential article from 1909, Magnus Olsen argued that *Skírnismál* was a poetic treatment of an ancient Nordic fertility topos. The poem's main male character, the god Freyr, represents the light which brings with it fertility, while the giantess Gerðr is the field which receives Freyr's gifts which enable her to bear fruit. According to Olsen, the love story of Freyr and Gerðr represents a spring ritual which unites heaven and earth after a cold winter.

The personified forces of nature meet for the benefit of man.¹ This view of love encounters in mythological poetry remained in favour until recent decades.²

From the 1970s onwards, scholars have attached importance to this poem as an expression of people's own romantic problems, but set in a mythic world. Lars Lönnroth (1978) asserted that *Skírnismál* reflected the conflict between society's demand for marriage and a man's love for a woman in ancient Icelandic and Norwegian society. Freyr acts in contravention of society's norms, while Gerðr for her part shows the correct degree of aloofness. Others have interpreted the poem as a depiction of the oppression of men by independent women.³ In both cases, Gerðr no longer represents a field, but stands for Norse womanhood as a whole. The love motif in the poem has been disconnected from the world of the gods, and mythology becomes merely a backdrop for a human drama.⁴

In recent years, there has been a tendency — perhaps because of this disconnection — to date *Skírnismál* and other mythological poems well into Christian times. Arguments for late dating include a lack of respect for the gods, verses of a late type, and a Christian view of society in the poem.⁵ On the other hand, there are good reasons to argue that the poems have old roots. The myth of Gerðr and Freyr from

¹ Magnus Olsen, 'Fra gammelnorsk myte og kultus', *Maal og Minne*, 1909, 17–36. The myth of the abduction of Iðunn by the giant Þjazi has been subjected to similar interpretations; see Anne Holtsmark, *Studier i norrøn diktning* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1956), pp. 151–52; Richard North, 'Introduction', in *The Haustløg of Þjóðólfr of Hvinir*, ed. and trans. by Richard North (Enfield Lock: Hisarlik Press, 1997), pp. xxix–xxxi.

² On earlier interpretations of *Skírnismál*, see Gro Steinsland, *Det hellige bryllup og norrøn kongeideologi* (Oslo: Solum, 1991), pp. 30–38. See also reviews of scholarship concerning Norse mythology and Eddic poetry by John Lindow, 'Mythology and Mythography', in *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide*, ed. by Carol J. Clover and John Lindow, *Islandica*, 45 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 21–66; and Joseph Harris, 'Eddic Poetry', in *ibid.*, pp. 67–156.

³ Lotte Motz, 'Gerðr: A New Interpretation of the Lay of Skírnir', *Maal og Minne*, 1981, 123–36; cf. Carolyne Larrington, 'What Does Woman Want? Mær and Munr in *Skírnismál*', *alvissmál*, 1 (1992), 3–16.

⁴ Stephen A. Mitchell, 'För Scírnis as Mythological Model: *frið at kaupa*', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 98 (1983), 108–22; Julie Randlev, 'Skírnismál: En tekst – og dens udsagn; digtning og tradisjon', *Maal og Minne*, 1985, 132–58; Paul Bibire, 'Freyr and Gerðr: The Story and its Myths', in *Sagnaskemmtun: Studies in Honour of Hermann Pálsson*, ed. by Rudolf Simek and others, *ScriptOralia*, 51 (Vienna: Böhlau, 1986), pp. 19–40; Anne Heinrichs, 'Die Lebensranke Freyr, euhemeristisch entmythisiert', *alvissmál*, 7 (1997), 3–36.

⁵ For a discussion of the arguments, see Jónas Kristjánsson, 'Stages in the Composition of Eddic Poetry', in *Poetry in the Scandinavian Middle Ages*, ed. by Teresa Päröli, *Atti del 12° Congresso Internazionale di Studi sull'alto medioevo* (Spoleto: Presso la sede del Centro studi, 1990), pp. 201–18 (pp. 210–13). There has been intense discussion of poems like *Þrymskviða*, *Lokasenna*, and *Rígsþula*.

Skírnismál may have been the motif for the small gold foils found in the post-holes of buildings from the seventh to tenth centuries.⁶ Also, there are many stone carvings dating to before 1000 which refer to the same myths we know from the poems. Motifs and phrases from Eddic poetry were used by the skalds in their poems and verses as early as the ninth and tenth centuries.⁷ Between 1220 and 1225, Snorri Sturluson wrote his textbook on skaldship and mythology known as the *Prose Edda* using many of the mythological poems as sources. Snorri's retelling of the myths diverges here and there from the Eddic versions. This may be because he had access to some poems since lost or knew alternative versions of poems that have survived. It is equally important to realize that Snorri used the mythological material as part of a larger mythography, and as such it is a product of the written tradition. An oral tradition can more clearly be seen in the mythological poems, where an overarching theology is absent. For that reason the poems often display discrepancies in regard to how the gods are portrayed.⁸ There is broad agreement that, as a source for social ideas, the mythological poems are more reliable than retellings of the same myths by Snorri and others.⁹ As a starting point, then, we can say that the mythological poems build on pagan mythological traditions even if the written versions that have come down to us did not take shape until Christian times.

The Structure of the Mythological World

The mythological poems often give only fragmentary pictures of Scandinavian mythology. Despite the lack of a systematic theology surrounding the gods, the society in which the gods are portrayed is remarkably consistent. A certain amount of knowledge about the characters was presupposed for the audience to understand the events in individual mythological poems — for example the rage of Þórr (Thor), the

⁶ On gold foils, see Gro Steinsland, 'De nordiske gullblekk med parmotiv og norrøn fyrsteideologi', *Collegium Medievale*, 1 (1990), 73–94.

⁷ Bragi Boddason used *Hamðismál* in the ninth century, Eyvindr skáldaspillir drew on *Hávamál* in the 960s, and *Völuspá* was known to Arnórr jarlaskáld c. 1065. These allusions to mythological poems by skalds are of course not evidence that these poems existed in the same form, or in any fixed form for that matter, when the skaldic poems were composed.

⁸ On the mythological variations in the mythological poems, see John McKinnell, *Both One and Many: Essays in Change and Variety in Late Norse Heathenism*, Philologia, 1 (Rome: Il Calamo, 1994).

⁹ See Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, 'Om eddadigtenes alder', in *Nordisk hedendom: Et symposium*, ed. by Gro Steinsland and others (Odense: Odense University Press, 1991), pp. 217–28 (p. 228); and the recent discussion of *Rígsþula* by Sverre Bagge, 'Old Norse Theories of Society: From *Rígsþula* to *Konungs skuggsjá*', in *Speculum Regale: Der altnorwegische Königsspiegel (Konungs skuggsjá) in der europäischen Tradition*, ed. by Jens Eike Schnall and Rudolf Simek, *Studia Mediaevalia Septentrionalia*, 5 (Vienna: Fassbaender, 2000), pp. 7–45.

wisdom of Óðinn, Loki's treacherous nature, the forces of chaos that threaten, and the relationship between Æsir and giants. If we can get a sketch of the tales that lie behind these myths, it is possible to approach the world of the gods through the anthropological method. In the 1990s, many scholars highlighted gender and the role of marriage in the structure of mythological society.¹⁰ For a historian, the stories in the mythological poems primarily offer insight into how people imagined the social significance of love and marriage within the unique world of the gods.

An anthropological analysis of the mythological world reveals that it consists of three different social groups. The most powerful of these are the Æsir, represented by such notable characters as Þórr and Óðinn. They live in Ásgarðr with the *Vanir* named Njörðr, Freyr, and Freyja. The relationship between these two groups is not entirely clear, and many today believe that the Vanir were earlier fertility gods who survived the 'invasion' of the warrior gods Óðinn and Þórr into Norse religion. One myth recounts that the Æsir and Vanir fought one another early in time. They finally decided to call a truce and exchanged hostages. Hœnir and Mimir went to Vanaheim, while Njörðr, Freyr, and Freyja joined the gods at Ásgarðr.¹¹ The two groups share a common adversary, the giants. The giants are the enemies of gods and men and represent the forces of chaos in Norse mythology. The giant world is not a faraway and isolated world; the Æsir make regular visits to obtain vital energy and knowledge. The forces of chaos are necessary, but at the same time they are dangerous and must be held in check by the gods. Thus, the giants represent a constant threat to cosmic world order.

The geography of the mythological world is based on circles. Ásgarðr is at the centre, with the tree Yggdrasil as its midpoint. Outside Ásgarðr lies Miðgarðr, where mankind lives, and farthest out is Útgarðr. This can be seen as an indication that people felt they lived between the forces of chaos and cosmos in the world and were obliged to appease both sides. Moreover, this mythological world resembles the old Norwegian or Icelandic countryside: the *tuntre* or farmyard tree under which the original owner was buried symbolized the centre of the world, the *axis mundi*, and family continuity; the people lived around it, and beyond lay the wilderness bristling with possibilities and with potential enemies.¹² The three social groups were a parallel for every household's identity, its friends and allies and the threats from outside the pale.

¹⁰ Torben Anders Vestergaard, 'Marriage Exchange and Social Structure in Old Norse Mythology', in *Social Approaches to Viking Studies*, ed. by Ross Samson (Glasgow: Cruithne Press, 1991), pp. 21–34; Margaret Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes: Old Norse Myths in Medieval Northern Society*, vol. 1: *The Myths*, The Viking Collection, 7 (Odense: Odense University Press, 1994).

¹¹ The idea of the Vanir as a distinct group is evident in *Völuspá* 24 and *Skírnismál* 18; cf. *Hkr:Ys* ch. 4; SnE, p. 30.

¹² See in particular Gro Steinsland, *Eros og død i norrøn mytologi* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1997), pp. 24–36; Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (New York: Harcourt, 1959), pp. 22–28.

Óðinn's Seductive Arts

The poem *Hárbarðsljóð* tells of a contest between Óðinn and Þórr. Þórr boasts of his strength and daring in battling with giants. For Óðinn, who calls himself Hárbarðr in this poem, women are the important factor. He tells Þórr that he fought for five years with a certain Fjölvar on the island of Algræn. Óðinn not only showed himself a bloodthirsty warrior, but he also encountered women there. Þórr asks how the women conducted themselves around Óðinn. Óðinn replies:

Sparcar átto ver konor, ef oss at spöcom yrði,
 horscar átto vér konor, ef oss hollar væri;
 þær ór sandi síma undo
 ok ór dali díúpom
 grund um grófo;
 varð ec þeim einn öllum efri at ráðom,
 hvílda ec hía þeim systrom síau,
 oc hafða ec geð þeira alt oc gaman.
 Hvat vanntu þá meðan, Þórr? (18)

We'd have had lively women, had they been loyal to us;
 we'd have had wise women, had they been faithful to us;
 they wound their ropes from the sand,
 and from the deep valleys
 they dug the ground;
 I prevailed over them all with my plans;
 I slept with the seven sisters,
 and I got their hearts, and pleasure from them all.
 What were you doing meanwhile, Þórr?¹³

We no longer know the myth of Óðinn's visit to Fjölvar. In all likelihood it was a giant Óðinn went to fight. Óðinn's point in his battle of wits with Þórr is that raw muscle power over the enemy's men is not enough. Óðinn boasts that he won over the *wills* and *desires* of these women. That they showed strong opposition at first (as if they had had magical powers over nature) only serves to make his conquest more impressive. But it is not rape Óðinn is after; it is the women's 'love' he seeks. How does he manage to succeed?

In *Hávamál*, the 'High One' (that is, Óðinn) explains something of his skill in seducing women:

¹³ Eddic poems are quoted from *Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*, ed. by Gustaf Neckel, 5th edn, rev. by Hans Kuhn (Heidelberg: Winter, 1983), and are cited by stanza and (sometimes) line numbers. Translations of the Eddic poems are from Carolyne Larrington, *The Poetic Edda* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). The translation of this stanza is from p. 72. Further translations will be cited by page number in the text.

Fagrt skal mæla oc fê bióða
 sá er vill flióðs ást fâ,
 líki leyfa ins liósa mans;
 sá fær, er friar. (92)

He has to speak fairly and offer money,
 the man who wants a woman's love;
 praise the body of the radiant woman:
 he who flatters gets. (p. 26)

Nice gifts and flattery, thus, usually work. But Óðinn also has another ace up his sleeve if the ingratiating approach fails. Óðinn had mastered the art of awakening a woman's desire and love through magic. The sixteenth magical charm listed at the end of *Hávamál* is directed at coy women:

ef ec vil ins svinna mans
 hafa geð alt oc gaman,
 hugi ec hverfi
 hvítarmri kono
 ok sný ek hennar qlum sefa. (161.2–6)

If I want to have all
 A clever woman's heart and love-play:
 I can turn the thoughts of the white-armed woman
 And change her mind entirely. (p. 37)

Óðinn often uses his magic to gain the love of women, indicating that for him winning their love is a crucial aspect of total victory. This type of conquest is less important for Þórr; he slays both giants and giantesses.¹⁴

Hárbarðsljóð contains two other instances in which Óðinn boasts about his romantic successes 'in the east'.¹⁵ In stanza 20, he entices 'witches' from their husbands with *miklar manvélar* (*man* here means 'woman', while *vélar* has magical undertones). In stanzas 30–32, Óðinn tells Þórr that he 'played with the linen-white girl', also in the east. Óðinn says she enjoys dallying with him, but he loses her nevertheless. He adds, somewhat ironically, that he could have used Þórr's muscle to win her. Here Óðinn encounters opposition, clearly not from the woman herself, but from her father or brothers. Why is seduction such an important art for Óðinn, and why would it have been an ideal for a war god?

Óðinn's romantic escapades must be put into the context of the special social structure of the mythological world. Óðinn boasts of his encounters with *giant*-women.

¹⁴ *Hárbarðsljóð* 23; Eilífr Goðrúnarson's *Þórsdrápa* from c. 970–90 (Skj A, I, 148–52; Skj B, I, 139–44); cf. SnE, p. 100.

¹⁵ Probably Jötunheimar. In later tradition the home of the giants is always in the east; see Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards, *Legendary Fiction in Medieval Iceland*, Studia Islandica, 30 (Reykjavík: Bókauktáfa Menningarsjóðs and Heimspékideild Háskóla Íslands, 1971), pp. 22–25.

Óðinn does not seduce women at home in Ásgarðr. Much of the power Óðinn and the Æsir have over the giants lies in their ability to win over their wives' and daughters' minds, wills, love, and loyalty. A good example is the myth of how Óðinn steals the mead of poetry from the giant Suttungr. *Hávamál* relates that Gunnlōð, Suttungr's daughter, was put in charge of guarding the precious mead. Óðinn nevertheless manages to get into the vault and win her affections. He gets permission to taste the mead, but gulps it all down before leaving the weeping Gunnlōð:

ill iðgiold
lét ec hana eptir hafa
síns ins heila hugar,
síns ins svára sefa. (105.4–7)

a poor reward I let her have in return,
for her open-heartedness,
for her heavy spirit. (p. 28)¹⁶

Óðinn's relationship to women has many important functions. First, he fathers children with many of these giant-women, children who become important mainstays for the gods. A few examples of such offspring are Þórr, son of Jǫrð, Váli, son of Rindr, and Víðarr, son of Grid.¹⁷ Þórr became a defender of the gods against the giants, Váli was born to avenge Baldr, and Víðarr was the avenger of Óðinn at Ragnarök. Second, Óðinn can boast that he has won the women in spite of their fathers' and brothers' opposition, symbolizing that the Æsir are actually more powerful than the giants as long as they can have control over their women. It should be noted that this control is not limited to physical power or the purely sexual. Time and again, the giants' weakest point is revealed to be their wives' and daughters' *love* for Óðinn. The most important thing is to obtain their 'love', convince their 'minds', win their 'hearts'. Women's emotions are thus the primary means of control in the mythological poems; even sexual intercourse has a secondary significance as a power symbol.

The Gods' Control over Women's Minds: Precarious Power

Óðinn does not marry giantesses; he takes them as lovers. The Æsir sought their wives among their own kind or the Vanir.¹⁸ Óðinn is married to Frigg, Þórr to Sif, Baldr to

¹⁶ The story can also be found in *Snorra Edda*. Snorri writes that Óðinn obtains help from Suttungr's brother Baugi to get in to see Gunnlōð. He spends three nights with her, receiving as a reward one draught of the mead of poetry for each night. In three draughts he drinks up all the mead and flies back to Ásgarðr in an eagle's shape (SnE, pp. 82–85).

¹⁷ Jǫrð: *Vǫluspá* 56; *Grimnismál* 24; *Lokasenna* 58. Rindr: SnE, p. 90. Grid: SnE, p. 106.

¹⁸ There is one exception to this; in Eyvindr skáldaspillir's *Háleygjatal* 3–4, Skaði and Óðinn are said to be married; cf. Steinsland, *Det hellige bryllup*, pp. 213–26. According to Snorri, Skaði was one of the goddesses.

Nanna.¹⁹ When, long in the past, the Æsir and Vanir made peace with one another, the Vanir gave their best woman, Freyja, to the Æsir. We never hear of an exchange of women to the Vanir. This leads to the supposition that the Æsir withheld their women intentionally to support the idea that they had a higher social status. The two Vanir who lived among the Æsir, Njörðr and Freyr, found their wives outside Ásgarðr, that is, from a social group Óðinn only regarded as a source of mistresses. This indicates an important social distinction between Vanir and Æsir, even if they lived together in Ásgarðr.

Torben A. Vestergaard has pointed out that this marriage pattern implies an accumulation of women by the Æsir. The other two social groups would experience a shortage of women.²⁰ This exchange system has important consequences for the balance of power in the mythological world. Marcel Mauss has identified a similar characteristic in societies the world over: refusing to give, neglecting to invite, and declining to receive are the same as a declaration of war; it is a refusal to enter into alliance and fellowship.²¹ For the Æsir to allow giants to marry Ásynjur would be the same as accepting equal status between Ásgarðr and Útgarðr.²² The Æsir's unwillingness to exchange their women is a refusal to grant the giants the same social status. Therefore, the distribution of women at the top of the system becomes an aspect of the Æsir's control of the other groups. In the mythological poems, this distribution is based to an overwhelming degree on the women's desires. However, there are two problems for the Æsir with this system. What if the giantesses prove immune to the Æsir's charms? And what if the giants gain control of the Ásynjur? The mythological poems give us a few examples of such dangerous situations.

One example is to be found in *Hávamál* where Óðinn encountered Billing's maiden.²³ She casts a spell on the god and tells him to come back in the evening to have her 'will'. Óðinn considers his conquest certain:

hitt ec hugða,
at ec hafá mynda
geð hennar alt ok gaman. (99.4–6)

this I thought I would have,
all her heart and her love-play. (p. 27)

¹⁹ Freyja is called *Óðs mey* in SnE, p. 55, and *Völuspá* 25. Óðr is probably another name for Óðinn. Frigg, Óðinn's wife in most of the sources, has been interpreted as another name for Freyja. Only later did they develop into two different goddesses; cf. Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes*, I, 97–98.

²⁰ Vestergaard, 'Marriage Exchange', pp. 28–30.

²¹ Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason of Exchange in Archaic Societies* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 30.

²² Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes*, I, 112.

²³ *Hávamál* 96–102. Whether *Billing's mæ*r is the giant Billing's wife or daughter is unclear.

Here as well he attempts to use magic on the woman, but when he gets to the bed, all he finds is a whore. Óðinn's magical powers even make the whore desirable, but the girl's absence makes him vulnerable to derision and shame. The story shows a more negative attitude to love when it is a man who loves and is duped. To love a woman is to be in her power. Therefore, *Hávamál* advises against depending on a woman's word. She is often untrue and tends to speak deceitfully,

þvíat á hverfanda hvéli
vóro þeim hiǵto scǵpuð,
brigð í bríost um lagit. (84.4–6)

for on a whirling wheel their hearts were made,
deceit lodged in their breasts. (p. 25)

Women cause men to forget their social obligations, companionship with other men, and therefore the lover's social position:

Hón svá gorir,
at þú gáir eigi
þings né þióðans máls;
mat þú villat
né manncis gaman,
ferr þú sorgafullr at sofa. (114)

she'll bring it about that you won't care
about the Assembly or the king's business;
you won't want food nor the society of people,
sorrowful you'll go to sleep. (p. 30)

Therefore, *Hávamál* advises men against lusting after women. 'That mighty desire' makes even the wisest man into a fool (94.4–6). A man must watch out for crafty women because they can easily overpower him:

fiolkunnigri kono
scalattu í faðmi sofa,
svá at hon lyki þic liðom; (113.5–7)

in the arms of a sorceress you should never sleep,
so that she charms all your limbs. (p. 29)

A man's control of a woman's mind and love is never a given, even for such a man as Óðinn. Women are only a means Óðinn makes use of, but they can awaken dangerous desires in men — dangerous in the sense that the normal relationship between men and women, and between gods and giants, would be turned on its head.²⁴

²⁴ On women as a threat to men in *Hávamál*, see also sts 79, 81, 82, 84, 86, 90, 91, 93, 89, 113, 114, and 118; cf. Else Mundal, 'Kǵld eru kvenna ráð', in *Kvinner og bøker: Festskrift til Ellisiv Steen på hennes 70-års dag* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1978), pp. 183–93.

His interest in women makes Óðinn vulnerable to the giants in his encounter with Billing's maiden. Óðinn's romantic adventures have a wider power perspective affecting the entire structure of that society. The motto in *Hávamál* seems to be to get power over women before they get power over you! As soon as lust becomes more important than strategy, it endangers the system of exchange of women that keeps the mythological world stable.

We can also recognize this pattern in what is perhaps the most famous love story in Norse mythology: the story of the giantess Gerðr and the Vanir god Freyr. As we have seen, the Vanir had difficulties obtaining wives in Ásgarðr. For the Vanir, the mythological marriage system meant that their choice was limited to either Vanir women or giantesses. In the latter case, they had to challenge the forces of Útgarðr. The Vanir god Njörðr had no problem obtaining a wife, but in his case, it was the woman who played the active role. This is how it came about: after the giant Þjazi was killed by the gods, his daughter Skaði demanded vengeance. The Æsir pacified her by promising to let her choose a husband from among the gods. The only condition was that she could see only the gods' feet. Skaði wanted Baldr, the most beautiful of the Æsir, and so chose the god with the nicest feet. But the god with the nicest feet turned out to be the sea-god Njörðr.²⁵ Thus the Æsir prevented Skaði from skipping over a link in the marriage system; as a giantess, it was better for her to marry one of the Vanir.

Njörðr's son, Freyr, ran into problems of an entirely different nature when he sought a giantess for a wife. The poem *Skírnismál* relates that Freyr sits in Óðinn's seat (*Hliðskjálf*) from which he can see out over the whole world. In Jötunheimr his eye falls on the beautiful Gerðr. After this, Freyr is in low spirits. At first everyone believes that he is angry at someone, but his servant Skírnir discovers the real reason for Freyr's dejection and goes to Jötunheim to get Gerðr. Skírnir takes with him eleven golden apples (presumably Iðunn's life-giving apples) and the magic ring Draupnir which drips eight identical rings every ninth night, which are offered to Gerðr if she will say that Freyr is the man she finds 'the least hateful' (19). But Gerðr says she will never accept these gifts because of any man's desire (20).

Skírnir is then forced to change his tactics: from offering her gifts, he switches to threatening to kill her family. When this method also proves unsuccessful, Skírnir proceeds to pronounce curses on her with the help of a 'taming wand' (*tamsvǫndr*). If she does not give herself to Freyr, Gerðr will be as the thistle, dry and unfruitful (31). This threat of 'drying out' is clearly linked to her sexuality. Gerðr is threatened with having to be satisfied with the frost-giant Hrímgrímnir and a three-headed monster, a relationship which involved a socially inferior union even for a giantess (35).²⁶ Finally he carves three curses on a *gambanteinn*: *ergi*, *æði*, and *ópola* (36).

²⁵ SnE, p. 81; cf. Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes*, I, 119–23.

²⁶ Hrímgrímnir and the three-headed monster (*purs*) belong to the underworld rather than Jötunheimr; see Randlev, '*Skírnismál*', p. 152.

Ergi is usually translated as ‘perversity’, *æði* is ‘madness’ or ‘ruin’, and *óþoli* is an unbearable sexual affliction. Gerðr finally gives in to these intimidations. She promises to give herself to Freyr in Barri grove in nine nights (39). *Skírnismál* closes with Freyr’s complaint that he can hardly wait *one* night for Gerðr’s embraces (42).

Seen in the light of the structure of the mythological world, Freyr’s desire for Gerðr in *Skírnismál* is problematic in that it places the gods in the weaker position. It is impossible for Freyr to enter into marriage negotiations with Gerðr’s parents; it would be tantamount to recognizing the giants as socially equal to the gods. It is necessary to go directly to the giant-woman herself, preferably over her father’s or brother’s dead body. But Gerðr refuses to follow meekly to Ásgarðr. In refusing Freyr’s advances, Gerðr also denies the position of power the Vanir claim over the giants. She lacks nothing in her father’s house and does not desire to travel (22). The desperation on Freyr’s side is demonstrated in the gifts Skírnir takes on his behalf. In exchange for Gerðr’s tender embraces he offers the precious apples which give the gods their youth and the ring Draupnir which is the source of their wealth. The sword Skírnir is given for the journey turns out to be sorely missed later in mythological time at Ragnarök.²⁷ Gerðr’s embraces are won only by threats against her, and the gods’ power over the giants is upheld.

We must also note here that the whole adventure is a struggle to win the woman’s love, not just her sexuality. The means used is the magic called *seiðr*, which breaks down her opposition. She is not, therefore, to be taken against her will: her will to love Freyr must be won first. This love is not based on a romantic feeling but on a victory of the stronger will. Gerðr’s promise to grant her love to Freyr is a sort of acquiescence. On the one hand, love-magic can be extremely oppressive to the woman: Gerðr is in a situation where she really has no choice in the end. On the other hand, *Skírnismál* shows how crucial it was for the gods to get control of women’s wills. Not having the women’s recognition and loyalty would undermine the social system of the mythological world. That is why such great gifts and strong magic were employed to make sure Gerðr would consent.

The other situation which could potentially ruin the system of exchanging marriageable women in the mythological world was if the women in Ásgarðr were drained away to Útgarðr. In the mythological poems, the giants are often portrayed as men with a great sexual appetite, a characteristic which denoted their weakness as compared with the gods when they failed to get the women they desired. The giants always want to get the goddess Freyja, best known as the Norse goddess of love.

In *Þrymskviða*, we are told that Þórr’s hammer has been stolen by the giant Þrymr. Loki goes to Jötunheimr and learns that the hammer is being held for ransom: Þrymr wants Freyja as his wife. Having this goddess is clearly more important to the giant than possessing the mighty hammer of the Æsir. Þórr goes confidently to the goddess to ask if she is willing to give herself up in exchange for the hammer. Freyja

²⁷ SnE, p. 41; *Lokasenna* 42; cf. Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes*, I, 133–34.

indignantly replies that if she did such a thing she would have to be the most ‘sex-crazed’ (*vergjarnasta*) woman of all (13). In the end, Þórr must dress as a bride himself to win his hammer back. This is breaking a taboo: Þórr having to go in drag to save the gods! Even so, this is a better solution than sending Freyja to the giants. By entertaining the possibility of exchanging Freyja for the hammer, Þórr is admitting that Þrymr has the upper hand in the situation. Freyja’s loathing of the giants is important for the Æsir because it halts a catastrophe in progress. Just as it was important for the gods to win giantesses’ love, it was critical for them that the women of Ásgarðr refused the advances of giants. Freyja is the one adhering to the norms here; she is acting to maintain the relationship between Æsir and giants and force the men to settle the matter for themselves. When, in *Lokasenna*, Loki accuses all the goddesses of being ‘man-crazed’ pursuers of giants, he highlights (in a rather grotesque way) the norms of their society.²⁸ Much of the power of the mythological world lay in women’s sexuality, and the Æsir depended greatly on the women in Ásgarðr not dealing out their favours to all and sundry.

In *Alvíssmál*, however, Þórr defends a woman from enemy powers, this time from the underworld. The dwarf Alvið has got hold of Þórr’s daughter. He intends to marry her no matter what Þórr says about it (1–8). Þórr gets a battle of wits going to play for time. Alvið will turn to stone in daylight, so when the sun begins to rise he has lost. Once again, the gods nearly lose control over their women. Only by trickery is Þórr able to deny Alvið the opportunity to win the woman.

Similar threats against the women of Ásgarðr can be found in the poem *Haustlǫng*, dating to c. 900.²⁹ In this poem, the skald Þjóðólfr of Hvínir tells of the giant Þjazi who succeeds in taking Loki away with him to Jǫtunheimr. In exchange for his freedom, Loki must lure Iðunn with her apples of youth to Þjazi. The gods, of course, are furious at Loki for this treachery, threatening to kill him if he does not bring Iðunn back immediately. Loki succeeds in the rescue and the status quo is restored (1–13). Þjóðólfr also tells of the battle between Þórr and the giant Hrungrnir. The poem does not mention the reason for the fight, but in the same story in *Snorra Edda* Hrungrnir has entered Ásgarðr and threatened to take both Freyja and Sif. In Bragi Boddason’s *Ragnarsdrápa* (late ninth century), Hrungrnir is said to have actually managed to kidnap one woman, Þrúðr, who is probably Þórr’s own daughter.³⁰

²⁸ *Lokasenna* 17 (Iðunn), 20 (Gefjon), 26 (Frigg), 30 (Freyja), 52 (Skaði), 54 (Sif); cf. Jenny M. Jochens, *Old Norse Images of Women* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), pp. 59–60. In opposition to many scholars, I reject the term ‘nymphomaniac’ for women who are accused of being ‘man-crazy’ or *ergi*. What is implied is not an inordinate desire for sex itself, but the desire for a man of lower social status.

²⁹ The standard edition of *Haustlǫng* is Skj A, 1, 16–20; Skj B, 1, 14–18. This poem has more recently been edited and translated by Richard North, *Haustlǫng*.

³⁰ *Ragnarsdrápa* is edited in Skj A, 1, 1–4; Skj B, 1, 1–4. In the end, Þórr beats Hrungrnir with the hammer (SnE, p. 152; cf. Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes*, 1, 114; North, ‘Introduction’, in *Haustlǫng*, p. xix).

The best example of the chaos that threatens if the union of an Ásynja and a giant bears fruit is the god Loki.³¹ As a result of his ‘unnatural’ origin, Loki is a being who gravitates between Ásgarðr and Útgarðr, gods and giants, nomos and chaos, humans and animals, men and women. He is the father of the chaos-forces Fenrir (the wolf who will kill Óðinn at Ragnarøk), Hel (who reigns over the realm of the dead), and the Miðgarðsormr (the world-serpent). According to *Hyndluljóð*, Loki ate the heart of a ‘wicked woman’ and gave birth to all the ogresses (41). *Snorra Edda* tells that Loki turned himself into a mare and gave birth to Sleipnir, Óðinn’s horse. Loki is a being who crosses all boundaries. He has no fixed sense of belonging to any of the groups which compose the mythological world. His defining characteristic is present from the moment of birth and serves to undermine society as the gods know it.³²

The significance of the gods losing their women to the giants is made crystal clear in *Völuspá*. In this poem, the end of the world — even Ragnarøk — is linked to the gods’ loss of control over women³³ when Freyja is given to the giants (25). Who betrays Freyja? We are not told, but it is probably Loki, himself a symbol of inverted alliances and also the one behind the death of the best of the gods: Baldr. The Ásir’s control over exchanges of women and marriages is over, their power over the giants and forces of chaos has crumbled, and so the world of the gods comes to an end.

The Myths: A Mirror of the Human World?

Might the love stories of the mythological poems reflect real people’s ideas about and attitudes towards love in the early Middle Ages? These love stories are set in a particular societal structure which real people could also recognize. This tripartite structure may also point back to Norse people’s world view in pre-Christian times.

These myths probably represent the ideas of a special societal group, the agricultural aristocracy.³⁴ First, there is a striking parallel between the threat of the giants

³¹ Loki is the son of the goddess Laufey and the giant Fárbauti, both of them unknown elsewhere (*Lokasenna* 52; SnE, p. 34; cf. Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes*, p. 101, n. 11). Another example of such an inverse union is the goddess Gefjón who gave birth to four children in the form of oxen.

³² On the liminal character of Loki, see Bjørn Bandlien, ‘Å være ragr: Liminalt kjønn i norrøn mytologi’, *dīn*, 2–3 (2001), 53–60.

³³ Vestergaard, ‘Marriage Exchange’, pp. 30–31.

³⁴ There is mostly internal evidence for the social context of skaldic performances in the Viking Age. Some mythological poems (e.g. *Völuspá*) have been connected to earls of Hlaðir, while *Skírnismál* is more likely to have been significant to the Ynglings further south in Norway; see Folke Ström, ‘Poetry as an Instrument of Propaganda: Jarl Hákon and his Poets’ in *Specvlm Norrænum: Norse Studies in Memory of Gabriel Turville-Petre*, ed. by Ursula Dronke and others (Odense: Odense University Press, 1981), pp. 44–58; Steinsland, *Det hellige bryllup*. Þjóðólfr of Hvinir composed *Haustrløg* for a chieftain in the south-eastern

against the goddesses and certain episodes in *Landnámabók* where slaves take women from prominent farmers.³⁵ Apparently defending the women of the farm against men of a lower social status was regarded as an important aspect of upholding the existing power ratio between farmer and slave. The mythological poems may indicate how important it was for the lady of the house or her daughter to avoid romantic entanglements with the slaves, and for the slave-women to be loyal to the farmer.

But the danger from slaves was not the farmer's only fear. The giants represented powerful forces from Útgarðr. In the farmer's world view, all men from outside — that is, from another farm with which he had no alliance — could be a threat to his control over the women of his household. If such an encroachment occurred, it was the farmer's duty to go out to meet the strong forces of 'Útgarðr' and avenge himself. On the other hand, a young man could go out in the world and challenge other men's control over their women in order to increase his own and his farm's prestige. In his own eyes he would be an Óðinn; to his opponent, however, he would be regarded as a Þjazi. We can see the contours of a society where one's environment was divided into 'self' (one's own household), 'friends/allies' (including relations by marriage at neighbouring farms), and 'others'. Every farm was 'Ásgarðr' for its inhabitants, and farms in the neighbouring valleys were looked upon as 'Útgarðr'. A common world view in the early Scandinavian Middle Ages did not prevent people from having different centres from which to interpret themselves and their environment.

The mythological poems show that the love men and women had for one another was assigned an important role in maintaining balances of power in such a society. On an individual level, the lover was in a weaker position while the beloved had control over the lover. This was a problem for both sexes. Women's (supposed) desire for men made them subordinate. Therefore, men could be vulnerable to women's dislike. Men tried to control women's will with flattery, gifts, and magic. But the mythological poems also reveal men's doubts about the lasting efficacy of this control.

People have always attributed a social significance to the relationship between man and woman. The Æsir have an important weapon against the giants in their ability to gain the love and loyalty of the giantesses. If the women's loyalty went the other way — towards the forces of chaos in Útgarðr — it would undermine not only the masculine identity of the Æsir, but their position of power as well. The women's position was twofold: they had an autonomous role in 'choosing sides' between the men of 'Ásgarðr' and 'Útgarðr', but they were also surrounded by men's desire for control. Women functioned as transitional figures in relations between world order and the forces of chaos, between 'us' and 'them'. It is striking that the only male god who can be described as a transitional figure between Ásgarðr and Útgarðr, Loki, often takes on the woman's role. The woman's will represented potential changes to

part of Norway c. 900; see Holtsmark, *Studier*, pp. 99–101; North, 'Introduction', in *Hauslǫng*, pp. xxxi–xli.

³⁵ Lnd (S) ch. 8, p. 125.

the world order, where ‘us’ could be pushed to the periphery and subjugated. For this reason, the female will and affections had to be controlled.

Women’s Construction of Heroes

The mythological world is divided into three groups, but the world view in the heroic poems is much more egalitarian. In principle, heroes all belong to the same social rank and are as a rule closely bound by ties of marriage, kinship, and/or friendship. An example is the close relationship of the heroes Sigurðr and Gunnarr Gjúkason, who are brothers-in-law and sworn brothers. King Atli, Gunnarr’s killer, is married to his sister Guðrún. Brynhildr, according to some poems Atli’s sister, is married to Gunnarr, but in love with Sigurðr, who later marries Gunnarr’s sister, the aforementioned Guðrún. According to the poem *Oddrúnargrátr*, Oddrún, the sister of Atli and Brynhildr, has a relationship with Gunnarr. Confusing? It is actually very simple: three separate families attempt to build up alliances through marriage, but love, honour, and greed bring it all tumbling down. Finally only Guðrún is left alive to mourn her ill fate.

Through these characters, the heroic poems explore the dilemmas that can arise when loyalties and emotional ties conflict. Should a woman’s loyalty be to her brother or her husband? What should a man do when his wife loves another, perhaps his best friend? How does a heroine behave when she discovers that the man she married is not the hero she believed him to be? The reader will have noted that love is one of the complicating factors. A more thorough reading of the heroic poems reveals that they are far more taken up with women’s emotions than those of men.³⁶ In contrast to the mythological poems, only women truly love — or sorrow. Heroes are primarily objects for women’s love or sorrow. Below I will attempt to explain why.

Source Problems in the Heroic Poems

The heroic poems are no easier to date than the mythological poems. These poems preserved in the *Poetic Edda* build on legendary material from the Migration Period.

³⁶ Bjarni Einarsson, *To skjaldesagaer: En analyse af Kormáks saga og Hallfreðar saga* (Bergen: Universitetsforlaget, 1976), pp. 16–17; Michail I. Steblin-Kamenskij, ‘Valkyries and Heroes’, *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 97 (1982), 81–93; Daniel Sävborg, *Sorg och elegi i Eddans hjältediktning*, Stockholm Studies in History of Literature, 36 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1997). On the possible female interest in and transmission of the heroic poems, see Else Mundal, ‘Kvinner og diktning: Overgangen frå munnleg til skriftleg kultur – ei ulukke for kvinnene?’, in *Förändringar i kvinnors villkor under medeltiden*, ed. by Silja Aðalsteinsdóttir and Helgi Þorláksson, Ritsafn Sagnafræðistofnunar, 9 (Reykjavík: Sagnafræðistofnum Háskóla Íslands, 1983), pp. 11–25; Gísli Sigurðsson, ‘On the Classification of Eddic Heroic Poetry in View of the Oral Theory’, in *Poetry in the Scandinavian Middle Ages*, ed. by Pàroli, pp. 245–55.

Based on the events in the poems, they are divided into three cycles around the stories of Völundr, Helgi, and Sigurðr. I would like to concentrate here primarily on the poems about Sigurðr. This cycle of poems can be further subdivided into two parts: the poems covering the time up to Sigurðr's death, and the poems describing the fate of his widow Guðrún. These poems might originally have been distinct from one another, but all are unified through the character of Guðrún Gjúkadóttir.³⁷

The sixteen poems telling the story of Sigurðr and Guðrún are believed to have come about over a period of almost four hundred years. *Atlakviða* is considered the earliest poem, dating to the ninth or early tenth century. The group of heroic poems from the early medieval period also include *Brot af Sigurðarkviða*, *Fáfnismál*, *Reginsmál*, *Sigrdrífumál*, *Guðrúnarkviða II*, and *Hamðismál*.³⁸ Many scholars consider other poems to have been composed as late as the early thirteenth century.³⁹ Therefore, we will begin by examining the poems from the earliest group.

***Atlakviða*: Guðrún Gjúkadóttir Caught between Kinship and Marriage**

The first part of *Atlakviða* tells of King Atli's murder of the Gjukungs, Gunnarr and Högni. According to *Atlakviða*, these two brothers lived up to all possible heroic ideals. They came to Atli's court alone despite many warnings. Their strength was not in strategy and planning, but in their blind courage. Högni meets death with heroic laughter, and Gunnarr has no fear when he is flung into the snake-pit.

Atli is married to the two Gjukungs' sister, Guðrún. Her revenge for her brothers is described in the second half of the poem. After Atli kills her brothers, she holds a banquet for him and his warriors, but she soon shows her complete loyalty to her brothers. At Atli's victory feast she serves him the two sons she bore him. She then burns Atli in his hall with all his company. The offering of her sons shows Guðrún's

³⁷ Finch operates with two sequences; the poems covering the marriage of Sigurðr and Guðrún and Sigurðr's death at the hands of Guðrún's brothers are termed 'Sequence A', while the poems where Guðrún is married to Atli and Íonakr are 'Sequence B'. Ronald G. Finch, 'Volsung-Niflung Cycle', in *MSE*, pp. 707–11. On the genealogy of these heroes, see Theodore M. Andersson, *The Legend of Brynhild*, *Islandica*, 43 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980); Jochens, *Old Norse Images*, pp. 137–38.

³⁸ Anne Holtsmark, 'Sigurdsdiktingen', *KLNM*, xv (1970), cols 224–31.

³⁹ Christian ideology and German literature influence poems such as *Guðrúnarkviða III*, *Atlamál*, *Oddrúnargrátr*, and *Sigurðarkviða in skamma*; see Anne Holtsmark, 'Heroic Poetry and Legendary Sagas', *Bibliography of Old Norse-Icelandic Studies 1965* (1966), 9–21; Theodore M. Andersson, '*Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar* and European Bridal-Quest Narrative', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 84 (1985), 51–75. However, I disagree with those who date all poems with a taste of emotion in it as late.

heroic courage; their death was painful for her as well, but hit Atli the hardest because he then dies without descendants.⁴⁰

Another heroic poem tells that Guðrún married Atli against her will,⁴¹ and it is tempting to interpret the bitterness of her revenge in that light. But *Atlakviða* indicates that the marriage was actually a happy one:

opt var sá leicr betri,
þá er þau lint scyldo
optarr um faðmaz
fyr ǫðlingom. (40.5–8)

often their play was better, when they lovingly
would embrace each other frequently in front of nobles.⁴²

The will to marry, then, is not the problem in *Atlakviða*. This poem, however, does not presuppose that Gunnarr and Högni had previously killed Guðrún's husband Sigurðr, so Guðrún's loyalty to her brothers is not made problematic. In *Atlakviða*, Guðrún's marriage to King Atli is in principle a sign of Atli's social equality with the Gjukungs. But it is clear that the poet considers the Gjukungs the stronger party and Atli envious of them (6–7, 20).

What makes Atli inferior to the Gjukungs is his lack of heroism. He exploits the Gjukungs' heroic boldness instead of either preserving the kinship alliance or challenging his rivals in an honourable way. The poem allows Guðrún to be happy with her husband before the betrayal, but she cannot live with him after his unheroic act. Atli betrays his wife as much as he betrays his brothers-in-law. The betrayal reveals the difference between husband and wife. Guðrún has lived according to the heroic code all along, but Atli's deeds can be seen as a negation of the same heroic ideals. Atli shows that he no longer lives up to her requirements for a good husband. Her loyalty to her husband lasts as long as he lives up to her standard. After the betrayal, it therefore becomes necessary for her to break the bonds of matrimony, an act which *Atlakviða* portrays in an understanding light. In the heroic world, a woman's formal consent at the beginning of marriage is not as important as her *will* to be married. For the marriage to retain its practical value the wife must continue to acknowledge her husband.

⁴⁰ Steblin-Kamenskij, 'Valkyries', p. 83; Elisabeth Vestergaard, 'Gudrun/Kriemhild – søster eller hustru?', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 99 (1984), 63–78 (p. 69).

⁴¹ *Guðrúnarkviða II* 25–36; cf. *Sigurðarkviða in skamma* 57, 61; *Guðrúnarhvøt* 11.

⁴² A related tradition may be found in the later *Guðrúnarkviða III* where Guðrún defends her marriage with Atli. *Nibelungenlied* (c. 1200) depicts the marriage between Etzel (Atli) and Kriemhild (Guðrún) as good.

A Woman's Love: A Threat to the Balance of Society

Sigurðr's role in the heroic poems is to be the perfect hero. Sigurðr's name and fame are chiefly associated with the slaying of the dragon Fáfnir, an almost superhuman feat. Fáfnir was wearing a 'helmet of terror' which struck fear in the hearts of all living beings. Sigurðr is thus able to exercise his best qualities, courage and fighting spirit.⁴³

In *Sigrdrífumál* we read that after slaying Fáfnir, Sigurðr meets the valkyrie Sigrdrífa on a mountaintop. She is sleeping in a shield-castle in full battle dress, and it is only when Sigurðr takes off her helmet that he discovers she is a woman. The mail-shirt she is wearing is as tight as if it were glued to her, but with his sword Gramr he cuts her free. She finally awakens and tells him her remarkable story: in a battle between two kings, she had allowed the king Óðinn supported to be killed. As punishment, he pricked her with a sleep-thorn and said she would never again win victory in battle. She also had to marry. Sigrdrífa was swift to counter with a vow of her own,

ec strengðac heit þar í mót at giptaz ongum þeim manni, er hræðaz kynni.

I made a promise against that; to marry no man who could be afraid.⁴⁴

Sigurðr is, of course, the only man who can fulfil this requirement. With the sword Gramr he slays Fáfnir; with the same sword, he also brings the valkyrie's love to life.

That the woman is a valkyrie is not unimportant in this context. Valkyries could decide a man's fate on a level with Óðinn. Their support and good will were important for a warrior to possess; Sigrdrífa had, after all, just turned a battle against Óðinn's will. Winning the valkyrie's love makes Sigurðr stronger. He is a hero with the powers on his side.

The rest of the story is uncertain because a number of pages at the end of this poem are missing from the *Codex Regius*. Fortunately the writer of *Völsunga saga* knew and used the lost poems, so it is possible to reconstruct them to a certain degree.⁴⁵ In the two later poems, Brynhildr assumes Sigrdrífa's role. According to *Helreið Brynhildar*, it was Brynhildr whom Óðinn imprisoned behind a shield-castle, surrounded by flames which only the fearless could ride through (8–10). In this version Sigurðr does not come upon this extremely selective woman by accident, but in helping his sworn brother Gunnarr Gjúkason get through the flames to win Brynhildr (10–13).⁴⁶ It

⁴³ Steblin-Kamenskij, 'Valkyries', p. 87, remarked that intellectual work and tactics were not Sigurðr's best qualities. See however Aaron Gurevich, *The Origins of European Individualism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), ch. 2.

⁴⁴ Brynhildr uses a very similar phrase in *Helreið Brynhildar* 9.

⁴⁵ The lost poems are probably the end of *Sigrdrífumál*, the whole of *Sigurðarkviða in meira*, and the beginning of *Brot*, to the point where Gunnarr has decided to kill Sigurðr; see Theodore M. Andersson, 'The Lays in the Lacuna of Codex Regius', *Speculum Norrænum*, ed. by Dronke and others, pp. 6–26.

⁴⁶ This is confirmed by *Brot* 17–19 and *Guðrúnarkviða I* 22.

transpires that Sigurðr has to ride through the flames with Gunnarr's appearance; Gunnarr cannot do it himself because his horse cannot get through the flames. Faithful as Sigurðr is to his sworn brother, he does not reveal his true identity. Brynhildr believes that Gunnarr is her fearless deliverer. Brynhildr and Sigurðr lie side by side for three nights before Sigurðr and Gunnarr change places.⁴⁷ Brynhildr is thus married not to the fearless deliverer but to the next best man. For his part, Sigurðr marries Guðrún, Gunnarr's sister.⁴⁸ And herein lies the tragedy of the heroic poems: the only man Brynhildr can accept as her equal has betrayed her and allowed her to marry a man who does not live up to her ideal. Moreover, this one man has married a woman Brynhildr regards as inferior to herself. The people around Brynhildr have caused her to break the oath she swore to Óðinn.⁴⁹

The social consequences of the betrayal come clearly to the fore when Guðrún and Brynhildr quarrel over which of them deserves to have the highest regard.⁵⁰ Before Brynhildr has found out she is not married to the best man, she demands to wash her hair farther upstream than Guðrún, a symbolic act demonstrating her higher position in society. Faced with such a challenge, Guðrún must tell her the truth about who really is married to the best man. Brynhildr is furious: 'No light-minded woman should ever / keep company with another woman's man; / then there'll be vengeance for all my sorrows.'⁵¹ By killing Sigurðr she wants first of all to degrade Guðrún, secondly to avenge herself on Sigurðr who broke his promises, and thirdly to finally have the best man still living, that is, Gunnarr.

For modern readers, it can be unclear what actually makes Brynhildr and Guðrún different. Why is Brynhildr entitled to more respect? Neither Sigurðr nor Gunnarr explains his choice of wife; it is rather the women who choose them. It could not be beauty; the heroic poems seldom mention either woman's appearance. What characterizes Brynhildr first and foremost is her power over men and that she is difficult to win. As we have seen in the mythological poems, a high degree of inaccessibility is

⁴⁷ *Helreið Brynhildar* 12 has eight nights, but this tradition is not confirmed elsewhere. The number eight may have some connection to the nine nights that Freyr had to wait according to *Skirnismál*. The connection between the geography and symbolism in the world of the gods and heroes is shown in *Helreið Brynhildar* 9 where the meeting between Brynhildr and Sigurðr is placed in 'Skata grove'; cf. 'Barri grove' in *Skirnismál*.

⁴⁸ This marriage is not mentioned in the Eddic poems, but is known from *Snorra Edda* and *Völsunga saga*.

⁴⁹ *Helreið Brynhildar* 5.5–8: 'hvé gorðo mic / Giúca arfar / ástalaus / oc eiðrofa'.

⁵⁰ SnE, pp. 130–31. This episode is missing from the *Codex Regius* (probably a part of the lost beginning of *Brot*); see Andersson, 'The Lays', p. 25. However, there are five other versions of this episode thought to come from an old part of the *Völsung cycle*; see Jochens, *Old Norse Images*, pp. 167–68.

⁵¹ *Sigurðarkviða in skamma* 41; cf. *Brot* 3.5–8: 'fyrman hon Guðrúno / góðra ráða, / enn síðan þér / sín at nióta'. In *Sigurðarkviða in skamma* 15, Gunnarr himself exclaims that Brynhildr ranks above all women.

often a sign of social superiority in and of itself. Brynhildr's valkyrie nature also involves a certain air of destiny. Warriors are powerless as long as she withholds her regard. Guðrún is thus her opposite: married on her parents' advice, she lacks the opportunity to choose for herself and the potential power over men that Brynhildr has.

For men in the heroic world, therefore, the love of women like Brynhildr is very important. This love is won not by flirtation, but by fulfilling heroic ideals such as courage and lust for battle. Sigurðr differs from his sworn brother and brother-in-law Gunnarr in his utter fearlessness. Heroic qualities are nevertheless most obvious when viewed from a woman's perspective. Through their wish to be married to the man with the best qualities, it soon becomes clear which warrior is the most illustrious and which lives closest to the heroic ideal.

In the heroic world, the societal ideal is *equality* among men. We have seen that the imbalance between Atli and the Gjukungs paved the way to suspicion and murder. That is why Gunnarr and Sigurðr seal their friendship and their relationship as brothers-in-law with sworn brotherhood. It is a way of showing the world that they do not wish to be divided by any strife or conflict. The women's love for Sigurðr causes events to turn out differently. The distinguishing function of women's love is made very clear in Guðrún's lament after Sigurðr's death. She recounts why she wanted to be Sigurðr's wife:

Svá var Sigurðr
 uf sonom Giúca,
 sem væri grænn lauer
 ór grasi vaxinn,
 eða hiortr hábeinn
 um hvössom dýrom,
 eða gull glóðrætt af grá silfri. (*Guðrúnarkviða II 2*)

So was Sigurðr beside the sons of Giuki
 like a green leek grown up out of the grass
 or a high-antlered stag among the sharp-eyed beasts,
 or red-glowing gold next to dull silver.

Implicit in her love poem to Sigurðr is a comparison with Guðrún's own brothers. The smouldering enmity between friends and kinsmen is already apparent in the next stanza:

Unz mér fyrmunðo
 mínir bræðr,
 at ec ætta ver
 qllum fremra; (*Guðrúnarkviða II 3*)

My brothers envied me
 that I should have a husband better than them all.⁵²

⁵² *Guðrúnarkviða I 18* has a similar statement: 'Sva var minn Sigurðr / hía somon Giúca, / sem væri geirlauer / ór grasi vaxinn, / eða væri biartr steinn / á band dreginn, / iarnasteinn /

Gunnarr and Hogni remain on a par with ordinary men when compared to Sigurðr. Thus a woman's love articulates and highlights differences between warriors that should ideally be equals. Brynhildr also plays on this when she incites Gunnarr and Hogni to kill Sigurðr. First she leads Gunnarr to believe that Sigurðr has broken his oath to Gunnarr and slept with Brynhildr the three nights he was with her (*Brot* 2), and then she reminds him that Sigurðr possesses the inheritance the brothers should have enjoyed (8–9). This makes it necessary for Gunnarr to kill Sigurðr to continue to be worthy of Brynhildr, but at the same time it is clear that he is breaking with the heroic norm (just as Atli does). For a husband to exercise power over his wife to make her 'dutiful' is out of the question; her will to love is, after all, an indication of whether he is living up to the heroic code.

Sigurðr himself stands as it were on the sidelines of this conflict; it is he who is being 'traded.' He has no need to act charming and polite for the women to win their love; all he has to do is be a fearless warrior. But at the same time, his pliability in regard to Brynhildr contributes to the loss of balance in society. He is *too* heroic and sacrifices Brynhildr for the sake of the sworn brotherhood, forgetting that love between a man and a woman is also a powerful force in heroic society. In the end, he pays the ultimate penalty.

Heroic Love in Two Social Models

In both the mythological and heroic poems, the love we have encountered is characterized by the same underlying ideas. Whether the social model is hierarchical as in the mythological poems or egalitarian as in the heroic poems, *women's* love is shown to have a very important part to play in either upholding or tearing down social structures. The difference is that while women's love for the Æsir upholds the hierarchy in the mythological poems, the same love in the heroic world tips the balance between men created by kinship, marriage, and friendship.

There is no strict distinction made between love and sexuality in poems from the early Norse period. The lack of a description of sexuality is hardly due to pre-Christian bashfulness or a later Christian writer's morality. The reason is that a woman's willingness to love a man had just as great a symbolic value as sex itself. This is expressed very eloquently in Freyr's longing for Gerðr's *embrace*. The arms of a loving woman around her man expressed the hope of the gods of winning the loyalty of their own and their enemies' women as well as the reward of heroes for fulfilling the heroic ideal.

Women's support and love spring from 'objective' norms for heroic behaviour. Their love is always directed to the best man. The heroes themselves are not very

yfir qðlingom.' See also the comparison made between Helgi Hundingsbani and other men in *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* 38.

demonstrative of their feelings for the opposite sex. Fearlessness and (rash) boldness is valued more highly than being in touch with one's emotions and paying court to women. Love is almost a social imperative in the sense that women *must* love the best man. Brynhildr wanted Gunnarr as long as she believed it was he who had ridden through the flame. Guðrún was happy with Atli until he betrayed her brothers. When faith in a man's heroic qualities fails, the woman's regard vanishes likewise. As in the mythological poems, men's status is linked to women's love and loyalty. We may term a love based on such objective norms *heroic love*.

This implies that women can end a marriage if the man breaks the heroic code. A good marriage in the heroic world requires *heroic consent*. Such a consent involves first and foremost the woman's continual recognition of the man's qualities and deeds, not (as marriage was later defined) a permanent pledge binding two people together for life. This consent, therefore, had nothing to do with the formal contracting of a marriage, but depended on the woman's *will* to be married.

Does this mean that in the early Middle Ages, Norse women were free to pick and choose the men they married? This is clearly not the case. The sources point to guidelines for the type of man a woman should love. It was almost a duty for women to give their love to a man who fulfilled objective norms for heroic qualities and deeds. Women who chose men below their own social status were designated as perverse and crazy. Such erotic motives were outside the pale of what was defined as love. This way of conceptualizing love had less to do with individualism than with objective criteria for meriting a woman's love.

I believe that the two social models and concepts seen in the poems can be related to the ideas and attitudes of early medieval people. In the three-tiered structure of the mythological world, the Æsir and Vanir continually strove to win women's love and loyalty. If women loved giants it would signify the triumph of the forces of chaos in the social system, when the world is turned upside down and Ragnarøk breaks loose. As we will see later, the fear that women would turn their loyalty and love to outsiders was something Norwegian and Icelandic fathers shared with the gods. In the egalitarian society of the heroic world, there was also a fear that love would reveal an otherwise suppressed difference in status between ideally equal men. This is the situation we encounter in both skaldic poetry and the sagas. Anthropologists have demonstrated the importance of friendship between men in the early Norse Middle Ages; I would propose that women's love was equally important as a social institution.

The sources from the early Norse Middle Ages have given us a different viewpoint than that of Elias in his theory of civilization. Whereas he emphasized the free rein of the sex urge in the early Middle Ages, we have seen that men's encounters with women were surrounded by social norms. Moreover, women — at least the mothers, sisters, and wives in a man's home environment — would have enjoyed greater respect than Elias postulated. Women were important transitional figures between different households and social groups in a society which was to a large degree built on personal relations. Who they were related to was far from unimportant. Certainly, as Elias also pointed out, heroic love was closely connected with

violence: in both mythological and heroic poetry, blood flows as a result of love. The reason, however, is different than Elias imagined. The crucial significance of love in upholding the structure of society meant that relationships between men and women could have major social consequences. The idea of heroic love could, for example, be used by men to display their power over other men through romantic relationships with their women. It could be as much a source of conflict as the free and aggressive sexuality Elias imagined, but it was directed more by norms than biology. In the chapters that follow, we will take a closer look at the cultural, social, and political consequences that could result from the heroic idea of love in Iceland and Norway in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries.

The Female Gaze on the Norwegian *hirð*

The Norwegian *hirð*, or body of king's retainers, was a masculine stronghold. Although one might assume that warriors would be less concerned with what women thought of their accomplishments and more interested in winning the king's approval, many scholars have called attention to how often Norwegian warriors addressed themselves to women when boasting of their deeds in verse.¹ According to the heroic code, men were not supposed to be emotionally submissive to women, but make women love *them*. Court poetry addressed to women gives us a glimpse of how the heroic code shaped men's view of their own longings for women's embraces and the significance this had for their personal honour.

This chapter will be primarily concerned with the periods 1015–66 and 1170–1202. A considerable amount of court poetry has come down to us in connection with the kings Óláfr Haraldsson (1016–30), Magnús góði Óláfsson (1035–47), and Haraldr harðráði Sigurðarson (1046–66). The period was characterized by prolonged warfare, both within Norway and against other countries, particularly Denmark. After Haraldr harðráði's fall at Stamford Bridge there was a period of relative peace until 1130. Then continuous struggles flourished until 1240. The most successful of the many pretenders in this period of civil war was Sverrir Sigurðarson (1177–1202). This is the first Norwegian king who had a secular saga written about him, a source that gives a good basis for comparison to the ideas and ideals of the eleventh-century poetry. What was the significance of women's love to warriors in the early Norwegian *hirð*?

¹ Roberta Frank, 'Why Skalds Address Women', in *Poetry in the Scandinavian Middle Ages*, ed. by Teresa Pàroli, Atti del 12° Congresso Internazionale di Studi sull'alto medioevo (Spoleto: Presso la sede del Centro studi, 1990), pp. 67–83; Bjarne Fidjestøl, *Selected Papers*, ed. by Odd Einar Haugen and Else Mundal, trans. by Peter Foote, The Viking Collection, 9 (Odense: Odense University Press, 1997), pp. 333–42; Anne-Louise Lien, 'Fra krigerflokk til høvisk hoff? Æresbegrepet i norsk hirdmiljø fra ca. 1000 til 1270' (unpublished master's thesis, University of Oslo, 1997), pp. 38–41.

Women as Bestowers of Honour

Sigvatr Þórðarson is perhaps the best-known of the skalds surrounding King Óláfr Haraldsson. He was present at the battle of Nesjar on 26 March 1016 when Óláfr won an important victory over Earl Sveinn Hákonarson. In one of the stanzas of the so-called *Nesjavísur*, Sigvatr recounts:

Frýrat oss í ári
innþrænzki, þótt lið minna,
gørt hugðak svá, snertu
snotr mæri, konungs væri ;
brúðr mun heldr at háði
hafa drótt, þás framm sótti
(fold ruðum skers), ef skyldi,
skeggi, aðra tveggja. (*Nesjavísur* 11; Skj B, I, 219)

This year the girl from Inn-Þrænðalög does not goad us to fight, and the king's army was the smallest. I think it is done. If the girl wants to mock someone, then it must be the others who assaulted their beards. The sea went red around the skerry.

According to *Heimskringla* the people of Inn-Þrænðalög supported Earl Sveinn, so the goading girl in the verse must have been on the side of the enemy. Sigvatr staged a scene where a girl of the enemy previously had mockingly goaded Óláfr's men to fight, but now that they had met in battle she had no one else to mock than her own men.² A warrior's desire to show the opponent's women his prowess also lies behind some skaldic verses by the Norwegian chieftain Hárekr í Þjóttu. He had been in Denmark with King Óláfr Haraldsson, but to get home he had to sneak his ship past the Danish king, Knútr the Great. First he speaks a verse in which he establishes that 'all know that I am unafraid'. He then turns to the women and says:

Lækkak Lundar ekkjur,
læbaugs, at því hlæja,
skjótum eik fyr útan
ey, né danskar meyjar,
Jorð, at eigi þorðak
ifla flausts í hausti
á flatslóðir Fróða
fara apr Vali krapta. (*lausavísa* 2; Skj B, I, 286)

I steer the longship out from the island; Danish maidens or women in Lund shall not laugh because of this; that I would not dare to ride sea-horses [ships] on Fróði's plain roads [ocean] this autumn.

² Sigvatr's phrase 'to go forward with the beard' (*sótti framm skeggi*) can be interpreted as an indecent way to fall, suggesting the passive part of a sexual encounter.

Women are portrayed in two ways in Sigvatr's and Hárekr's verses, as either egging the men on or shaming them. Both functions are closely bound up with men's role as warriors. Sigvatr is clearly pleased that the woman from Inn-Þrænðalog does not have to egg the warriors on in battle. For his part, Hárekr plays on the idea that a man's fearlessness stops the derisive laughter of a woman. King Haraldr harðráði referred to these roles before the battle of Stamford Bridge in 1066:

Krjúpum vér fyr vápna
(valteigs) brökun eigi
(svá bauð Hildr) at hjaldri
(haldorð) í bug skjaldar ;
hátt bað mik, þars mœttisk,
menskorð bera forðum,
hlakkar íss ok hausar,
hjalmsall í gný malma. (*lausavísa* 19; Skj B, I, 332)

In battle we do not hide from the crash of weapons in the hollow of the shields; thus the loyal Hildr of the hawk-field [woman] commanded. Earlier, the necklace-pole [woman] told me to hold the helmet-stem [head] high in the clamour of steel [battle] where Hlökk's [valkyrie] ice [sword] and skulls were clashing.³

Snorri tells us that Queen Ellisif went with Haraldr as far as to the Orkneys, and it is conceivable that it was she Haraldr spoke with before the battle.⁴ In any case, we are shown here that a woman's incitement is the motivation for a king's action. It is on her commandment that Haraldr will fight with fearlessness and recklessness in the battle against the English. If we are to believe *Heimskringla*, Haraldr became wild during the battle, running out before his own men with neither fear nor strategy and hacking his enemies down before him until he was stopped by an arrow in the throat. Although most historians would hesitate to even mention this motivation for fighting bravely at Stamford Bridge, the stanza links the battle to a wider, heroic scene. He was truly a hero after Sigrdrífa's own heart!

In view of women's role as judges of men's war deeds, their scorn was feared and their recognition coveted. This is why the skald Sigvatr was proud when he was able to boast of having impressed the women of Skara. In *Austrfaravísur* he relates:

Út munu ekkjur líta,
allsnúðula, prúðar
— fljóð séa reyk — hvar ríðum

³ I follow the translation in *Morkinskinna: The Earliest Chronicle of the Norwegian Kings (1030–1157)*, trans. by Theodore M. Anderson and Kari Ellen Gade, *Islandica*, 51 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), p. 271, st. 146.

⁴ It is also possible that Haraldr referred to his coat of mail, named Emma. The mail coat may possibly be named after the mother of Edward the Confessor: Roberta Frank, *Old Norse Court Poetry: The Dróttkvætt Stanza*, *Islandica*, 42 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), pp. 152–53.

Rognvalds í bý gognum;
keyrum hross, svát heyri
harða langt, at garði,
hesta rös ór húsum
hugsvinn kona innan. (*Austrfaravísur* 12; Skj B, I, 222–23).

The proud girl has to look quickly out as we ride through Rognvaldr's town; the woman sees smoke [dust]. We spur our horses, so that the wise woman hears the horses' hoofbeats clearly from inside the house for a good distance.⁵

Compared to other skalds, Sigvatr was relatively little taken up with women. His primary interest was the king and the band of warriors.⁶ Nevertheless, he too appealed to women to give significance to his actions.

The skald Þjóðólfr Arnórsson used the same technique when he left Niðaróss in 1060 with King Haraldr harðráði's army: 'Fair maiden! [...] See how the long, glorious dragon [ship] lies beside the land', Þjóðólfr boasts of the ship they were to sail.⁷ 'From the city women could see the glorious serpent [ship]', he continues proudly.⁸ The women marvelled at how they launched away from land: 'Women stand and wonder about the way we lead the oars.'⁹ The warrior was conscious of a woman's gaze on all his actions. Her recognition of the warrior's conduct was his reward and distinction.¹⁰

⁵ *Liðsmannaflokkur* 5 (concerning the victory of the Danes at London in 1017 and allegedly performed by Óláfr Haraldsson) opens identically ('Út mun ekkja lita', Skj B, I, 392).

⁶ Jenny M. Jochens, 'From Libel to Lament: Male Manifestations of Love in Old Norse', in *From Sagas to Society: Comparative Approaches to Early Iceland*, ed. by Gisli Pálsson (Enfield Lock: Hisarlik Press, 1992), pp. 247–64 (pp. 247–48); Fredrik Paasche, *Hedenskap og kristendom: Studier i norrøn middelalder* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1948), p. 336. But see also Judith Jesch, 'In Praise of Ástriðr Ólafsdóttir', *Saga-Book*, 24 (1994), 1–18.

⁷ 'Skeið sák framm at flæði, / fagrt sprund, ór ǫ hrundit; / kend hvar ligger fyr landi / lǫng súð dreka ens prúða' (*lausavísa* 18.1–4; Skj B, I, 351–52).

⁸ 'út þars ekkjur lita / orms súð ór bæ prúðar' (*lausavísa* 19.3–4; Skj B, I, 352).

⁹ 'ekcja stendr ok undrask / ára burð sem furðu' (*lausavísa* 20.3–4; Skj B, I, 352).

¹⁰ Court poems where the skald seeks and brags about a woman's admiration and approval: Skúli Þórsteinsson 3 (Skj B, I, 283); *Liðsmannaflokkur* 7–9 (Skj B, I, 392–93); Sigvatr Þórðarson, *Austrfaravísur* 12, 15 (Skj B, I, 223–24); Þjóðólfr Arnórsson, *Magnúsflokkur* 15, 23 (Skj B, I, 335, 337), *lausavísur* 18–20 (Skj B, I, 351); Haraldr harðráði, *lausavísur* 1, 6, 19 (Skj B, I, 328–29, 332); *Sveinsflokkur* 1 (Skj B, I, 393); Þórkell hamarskáld, *lausavísa* 2 (Skj B, I, 409); Gísl Illugason, *lausavísa* (Skj B, I, 413); Sigurðr jórsalafari, *lausavísa* 3 (Skj B, I, 422–23). Court poems where the skald is afraid that the woman will despise him: Sigvatr Þórðarson, *Nesjavísur* 11 (Skj B, I, 219); Haraldr harðráði 3 (Skj B, I, 328); Hárekr Eyvindarson í Þjóttu, *lausavísa* 2 (Skj B, I, 286); Ulfr stallari, *lausavísa* 1 (Skj B, I, 372); [anonymous] *lausavísa* 6 (Skj B, I, 395). For a more comprehensive list, see Frank, 'Why Skalds', pp. 80–82; cf. also Judith Jesch, *Women in the Viking Age* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1991), pp. 151–58.

Eddic heroic poetry demonstrates that such recognition could differentiate men who were otherwise equals. A similar situation can be seen in skaldic verses praising the skald above other men. Such verses are often addressed to women. In his *Austrfaravísur*, Sigvatr boasts to a woman that he has boldly gone where her husband never dared to go:

sjá hefr, mjóð-Nanna, manni
 mín ókunnar þínum
 fótr á fornar brautir
 fulldregila gengit. (*Austrfaravísur* 15.5–8; Skj B, I, 224)

See, woman, this foot of mine walked most manly on ancient roads that your husband knew little of.

Sigvatr has not only travelled to dangerous places, he has done it manfully, as the woman's husband has not. Perhaps Sigvatr had the difference between the heroes Sigurðr and Gunnarr in the back of his mind; he praises himself at the husband's expense just as Guðrún praised Sigurðr as the foremost of all men.

Snorri Sturluson later understood the woman Sigvatr addresses in this verse as a real woman. However, she had no other significance to his story than to give Sigvatr an excuse to compose a verse. *Austrfaravísur*, though, was composed for a court audience *after* the journey.¹¹ An appeal to women in a verse could often be more due to poetic convention than a real situation; many of the verses we have looked at give a clear impression of having been composed in a context where women would not have been present.

If the appeal to women was primarily a poetic convention, the popularity of this convention must still be explained. Based on the skaldic verses we have examined here, one must conclude that this form was a common method of indicating that women would have acknowledged his deeds if they had been there. The male listeners were caused to see the skald through a woman's admiring eyes. The woman's role as fictitious audience could be used to define a warrior's honour in contrast to other men, and as a broader consequence, to preserve the male warrior ideal. This was a role that military leaders and kings must have regarded as useful for maintaining morale.¹²

It is nevertheless striking that chieftains and kings used a norm figure — whether a young maiden or a widow — which was closely associated to home and hearth rather than to the chieftain or king himself. This role for women certainly did not originate with the skalds. The woman as fictitious audience, therefore, may partly represent the woman's role as preserver and mediator of heroic norms and ideals for men in an otherwise egalitarian household sphere. It also incorporates ideas of women as transitional beings between 'self' and 'other', and may in some sense have

¹¹ Frank, 'Why Skalds', p. 73.

¹² Fidjestøl, *Selected Papers*, pp. 339–40; Frank, 'Why Skalds', pp. 74–75.

functioned as a psychological enticement to the retinue (*hirð*) for young warriors who longed for honour and for the love of Brynhildr-style women.

Widening the net to include other sources from the early Norse Middle Ages only reinforces our picture of skalds' desire for the approving gaze of women. This desire comes clearly to the fore in *Hrókskviða*. According to the legendary saga *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka*, this poem was directed to Brynhildr Hákisdóttir. In this poem the Viking Hrókr Hámundarson boasts of his battle prowess and courage. He sums up:

Segi eg suo kuedit
snottru uifi
at eg Brynhilldar
biðia mundag
ef uíta þættumzt,
at uilldi hon
Hroki unna
Hamundar bur. (Hálfs 74)

To the wise woman I say that I want to propose to the beautiful Brynhildr. I think I know that she would love Hrókr Hámundarson.

Hrókskviða is difficult to date, but was probably composed before 1100. In genre it is somewhere between a heroic poem and the more subjective skaldic style where the poet views his own deeds in skaldic wise through a woman's eyes.¹³

In addition to the poetry from the early Middle Ages portraying women as loving, shaming, and inciting men, in other contexts we also find women in the role of mourners. Heroic poetry often features long monologues by women sorrowing over their dead husbands, beloved champions, or heroic brothers. Examples are Guðrún's and Brynhildr's laments over Sigurðr's death and Oddrún's lament for Gunnarr. The ancient poem *Hjálmar's death-song* features the mortally wounded Hjálmar. In the two legendary sagas *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks* and *Orvar-Odds saga*, we are told that Hjálmar uses his last strength to recite a poem his comrades were to take to the princess Ingibjörg. In the poem, he recalls Ingibjörg's fear that their previous meeting would be their last. He assumes that Ingibjörg will grieve for him, and dies sad but content with her in his thoughts. The sagas relate that she dies upon hearing word of her lover's demise. The interesting point here is not the man's feelings for the woman, but the woman's great love and loyalty to the man. Her eternal sorrow magnifies the hero's deeds to legendary proportions.¹⁴

¹³ Daniel Sävborg, *Sorg och elegi i Eddans hjältediktning*, Stockholm Studies in History of Literature, 36 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1997), p. 123.

¹⁴ Qs chs 30–31; Herv ch. 3. See Lars Lönnroth, 'Hjálmar's Death-song and the Delivery of Eddic Poetry', *Speculum*, 46 (1971), 1–20, and Sävborg, *Sorg och elegi*, pp. 343–45, on this poem. There are clear parallels to European heroic poetry, e.g. Aude's reaction to the death of Roland in the *Chanson de Roland*, or the sorrow of women in Anglo-Saxon poetry, such as in *Wulf and Eadwacer* and *The Wife's Lament*; cf. Sävborg, *Sorg och elegi*, pp. 395–449.

The primary sources that indicate that the female audience was more than just poetic license are the many runestones raised in Scandinavia in the tenth and eleventh centuries. On these stones we often encounter expressions of women's sorrow. At the old Thing-place at Bällsta in Vallentuna parish, Uppland, Sweden, stand as a pair of runestones carved in memory of the chieftain Úlfr of Skålhamra, a powerful man in the region around the year 1000. Part of the inscription reads:

Auk Gyriði gats at veri. Þy man i grati getit lata.¹⁵

Also Gyrið loved her husband. Thus the woman in lament shall hail his memory.

Such an inscription in verse was more elaborate than the words found on most memorial stones women helped raise to their loved ones; nevertheless, the message always comes through: the husband will not be forgotten.¹⁶ A man had the hope of being remembered through a woman's sorrow. Women represented continuity between the generations and the anchor of the household. Women's honour-giving function in relation to men of the household in early Norse times meant that the bond between husband and wife could also be important. If a man risked his wife's disdain, he also risked the community retaining an unfavourable memory of his life, or worse, being forgotten entirely.¹⁷

The warrior that was exalted by women's recognition is something skaldic poetry has in common with runestones and heroic poetry. The most important difference is that the skald himself has become the subject. The heroic poems portray Sigurðr as emotionally isolated and indifferent to women, but skaldic poetry shows that members of the Norwegian *hirð* were very taken up with the fairer sex. Poetry gave the skalds a language in which they could express their desire for women's regard, but

¹⁵ Text, transcribed into Roman letters, from Lars Lönnroth, 'Ættsamhällets textvärld, ca. 800–1300', in *Den svenska litteraturen*, vol. 1: *Från forntid till frihetstid, 800–1718*, ed. by Lars Lönnroth and Sven Delblanc (Stockholm: Bonniers, 1987), pp. 33–56 (p. 50).

¹⁶ See Birgit Sawyer, *Viking Age Rune-Stones: Custom and Commemoration in Early Medieval Scandinavia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) on women's interests in erecting memorial stones in Scandinavia, especially in the eleventh century. She emphasizes the importance these stones had in inheritance cases.

¹⁷ It has been suggested that women may have commissioned poetry or visual art to hail the memory of great deeds of their kinsmen in the eleventh century. One example is the Anglo-Saxon poem *The Battle of Maldon* (c. 1000), possibly commissioned by the granddaughter of its hero, Byrhtnoth; see Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, 'The Hero in Christian Reception: Ælfric and Heroic Poetry', in *La funzione dell'eroe germanico: storicità, metafora, paradigma*, ed. by Teresa Pàroli, *Philologia*, 2 (Rome: Il Calamo, 1995), pp. 323–46 (pp. 344–45). Another example is the Bayeux tapestry; cf. Gerald Bond, *The Loving Subject: Desire, Eloquence, and Power in Romanesque France* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), pp. 18–41. Several recent studies have emphasized the important role of women remembering the men in their past; cf. Elisabeth van Houts, *Memory and Gender in Medieval Europe, 900–1200* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999).

also their fear of women's disdain. The admiration of women had a great symbolic value for the *hirð* in the eleventh century, and this idea helped in legitimizing and upholding warrior ideals. At the same time, these women were not just beings men used as mirrors for their own thoughts. Runestones indicate that women could themselves become involved in and use this discourse. Women's role as givers of honour should therefore be seen in the light of a society where values and honour were dealt out just as much through the household as from the king.

Violence against Women: A Hirð Ideal?

The woman who gives a man honour is a valued and respected character in skaldic poetry. She is the wise woman who possesses knowledge of heroic deeds. Nevertheless, some court poetry seems to glorify winning women by violence.¹⁸ Þjóðólfr Arnórsson composed this verse during one of Magnús góði's many battles against Sveinn Úlfsson in Denmark:

Menn eigu þess minnask,
 manna Sveins, at kanna,
 víga Freys, sízt vǫru,
 vef-Gefn, þrjár stefnur ;
 vǫn es fagrs á Fjóni
 fljóðs (dugir vǫpn at rjóða)
 verum með fylkðu folki
 framm í vápna glammi. (*lausavísa* 3; Skj B, I, 347, Hkr:Msg ch. 32)

Do not forget, men, to visit girls that belong to Sveinn's men, after you have made victory three times. We will find beautiful women on Fjón [Fyn], where we reddened weapons. Still, we have to go forward to the weapon-noise with the warriors.

In the light of warriors' pursuing enemy women's recognition in skaldic poetry, we can interpret the verse as a reminder to seek their praise. Here, however, it is not just the women's *regard* to which the skald is referring. In another verse, which Snorri says Þjóðólfr composed on the same occasion, we are told that 'women had to escape frightened through the woods' before Magnús góði's warriors.¹⁹ It is difficult to avoid interpreting the verses as anything other than an appeal by Þjóðólfr for his comrades to exploit the Danish warriors' women as war booty. The connection

¹⁸ The ideal of peace for women in a general, abstract sense is found in several fictional sagas from the thirteenth century, e.g. *Jónsvíkinga saga* and *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka*. These accounts should be interpreted in the light of the new military brotherhoods founded in the wake of the crusades; see Bjørn Bandlien, 'The Impact of the Templars in 12th-century Norway', in *Medieval History Writing and Crusading Theology*, ed. by Tuomas S. Lehtonen and Kurt Villads Jensen (forthcoming).

¹⁹ *Magnúsflokkur* 17; Skj B, I, 336; Hkr:Msg ch. 31.

between access to the enemy's women and power over the enemy is clear. By winning a woman against her will, the warrior shows his superiority to her menfolk. The poet's elaborations about the fair women's flight can then fill the same boasting function as phrases like 'I fed the ravens'.

The impression of a link between violence and sexuality in war is also confirmed by Valgarðr á Velli, one of Haraldr harðráði's skalds. According to Snorri, he spoke this verse when King Haraldr harried Fyn and Sjælland in Denmark:

láss helt líki drósar,
leið fyr yör til skeiða
(bitu fíkula fjótrar)
fljóð mart (hōrund) bjartra.²⁰

Then beautiful women were captured; on the journey to the ship chains gnawed on the body of the fair woman.

A similar description of attacks against women by Haraldr harðráði is also present in a verse by the skald Grani:

Lét aldrigi úti
ósvífr Kraka drífu
Hlökk í harða þjokkum
Hornskógi brø þorna ;
Fila dróttinn rak flóttu
fjanda grams, til strandar
auð varð út at reiða
allskjótt faðir Dóttu. (*Poem about Haraldr harðráði* 1; Skj B, I, 357;
Hkr:Hsh ch. 32)

The reckless one never gave the eye of the woman a chance to dry in the dense Hornskógr [on Jutland]. The lord of the Filar [King Haraldr] chased the enemy's fleeing army to the beach. Dotta's [or: Daughter's] father had to swiftly pay with his riches.

Again, there is an explicit reference to women also being taken prisoner and bound. If we interpret such skaldic verses as an expression of *hirð* norms, it indicates that a general 'peace for women' was not expanded in the eleventh century.²¹

These verses portray attacks against women, but it was the women's fathers and husbands against whom the violence was directed. That abduction takes place against the will of the enemy is just as important as the fact that the women themselves

²⁰ *Poem about Haraldr harðráði* 9.5–8; Skj B, I, 362; Hkr:Hsh ch. 19. Fredrik Paasche suggested that Valgarðr showed a certain compassion with the victims in this strophe; see *Norges og Islands litteratur indtil utgangen av middelalderen*, Norsk litteraturhistorie, 1 (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1924), p. 241. However, in other stanzas Valgarðr praises King Haraldr harðráði for striking fear into the hearts of Danish women.

²¹ E.g. Valgarðr á Velli 3, 6, 9 (Skj B, I, 360–62); Þjóðólfr Arnórsson, *lausavísa* 3 (Skj B, I, 347); Grani skáld 1 (Skj B, I, 357); Björn krepphendi, *Magnúsdrápa* 1, 6 (Skj B, I, 404–05).

resist. Defence of the women is, as for the Æsir, closely linked to the authority of a king, chieftain, or head of household to defend his land and the women who live there.²² For Haraldr harðráði's men, therefore, taking away the enemy's women was a sign of victory over their men.

It can be worthwhile to note the contexts in which violence against women is emphasized. The verses in which this theme comes up are primarily associated with the kings Magnús góði and Haraldr harðráði. They are also composed in connection with the battles with the Danish. The brutality may perhaps be explained by the fact that King Haraldr's *hirð* was a more professional fighting unit than that of earlier Norwegian kings.²³ Perhaps more importantly, the battles took place abroad, against a people not under the Norwegian king's protection. Magnús góði's attack on Danish women was clearly no obstacle to him being called 'the good' in Norway (according to the sagas, many of the skaldic verses mentioned above were composed *after* he had been given that title). This suggests that peace for women applied chiefly within a community. In court poetry, this community was composed of women within Norway; on a more local level, the same idea may have applied to women within a given household.

Here we see a parallel to the Ásgarðr/Útgarðr dichotomy in mythological poetry. Þórr's violent dealings with giantesses might be seen as an ideal because the giantesses were 'other'. The 'outside' group — whether giants or Danes — defines the 'inside' community as a unit. The behaviour pattern towards women within the group is different from how women are treated in the outside world. This same dichotomy in relationships to one's own and the enemy's women was also applied within the Norwegian *hirð* milieu in peacetime.²⁴ The ideals of oppression of 'outside' women and the desire for recognition by women 'at home' could thus exist simultaneously, as when Þjóðólfr Arnórsson boasts one moment that the Danish women had to run from him and his comrades, and the next moment basks in the

²² In skaldic language, land/earth is usually designated through female kennings; see Gro Steinsland, *Det hellige bryllup og norrøn kongeideologi* (Oslo: Solum, 1991), pp. 123–27. The connection between control over land and control over women is striking.

²³ Claus Krag, *Vikingtid og rikssamling, 800–1130*, Aschehougs Norgeshistorie, 2 (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1995), pp. 172–73.

²⁴ Karen Swenson's note on the two Norse genres of flyting, *mannjafnaðr* and *senna*, touches the same theme. Swenson explains *mannjafnaðr* is a quarrel based on a mutual acceptance of the two contestants within the same social space, while the *senna* seeks to define the opponent as something different, as outside the subject's and the audience's world. It thus defines the hero and his world; see Karen Swenson, *Performing Definitions: Two Genres of Insult in Old Norse Literature*, Studies in Scandinavian Literature and Culture, 3 (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1991), pp. 55–56: 'A *mannjafnaðr* functions to situate individuals within a hierarchy based on a defined "good" which is purportedly accepted by all. A *senna* functions to create the conditions — a society's boundaries, a definition of the hero — whereby that hierarchy may exist.' See also Kirsten Hastrup, *Culture and History in Medieval Iceland: An Anthropological Analysis of Structure and Change* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), pp. 147–48.

admiration he imagines the women at home were giving them.²⁵ The contrasting images of the women's happy homes and sorrowful women taken by the enemy reveal that the distinction between being inside and outside the community was more significant than the difference between man and woman in the context of idealization of physical use and abuse of power.

It seems, then, that attacking women in a different social space could be an ideal within the *hirð* milieu of Magnús góði's and Haraldr harðráði's time. The aim was to deprive one's opponents of honour by revealing their powerlessness over their women. For that reason, it was during overseas campaigns that such episodes of violence were expressed as norms for warriors.

Sverrir's Conquest of Norway — and its Women

Sverrir Sigurðarson became sole ruler of Norway in 1184. He had come to Norway in 1177 and attracted a small warrior following. These warriors were known as the *Birkibeinar* ('birch-legs') and had previously fought without any great success against King Magnús Erlingsson (1161–84). Earlier, Magnús had fought off a number of pretenders with help from his father, Erlingr skakki. He had won the support of most of the chieftains in Norway and was also heavily supported by the Church. Against all the odds, Sverrir and his *Birkibeinar* still managed to win Norway.²⁶

King Sverrir's warriors had perhaps an even stronger connection to the king than *hirð*-men did in the eleventh century, and thus were also less bound by traditional household ideals. It was in this period that rebellious factions began to swear allegiance to a king outside the regular Thing-meetings. By swearing loyalty to the king, the *Birkibeinar* hoped Sverrir could grant them recognition, riches, and a position in the *hirð*. In doing so, the *Birkibeinar* staked a great deal on their leader. It is chiefly the relationships and actions of the band of warriors surrounding Sverrir that we will examine here, but also how Sverrir himself related to traditional attitudes to women in war. As *Sverris saga* — our main source for warrior ideals for this period — describes the *Birkibeinar*, they were closer to what we would understand as professional soldiers. To some extent, *Sverris saga* reflects the attitudes of this group,²⁷ but the saga is also influenced by Sverrir's desire to portray his own role as favourably as possible in relation to the Church.

²⁵ See his *Magnúsflokkur* 15 and 17; Skj B, I, 335–36; Hkr:Msg chs 30–31.

²⁶ The scholarly literature on Sverrir is abundant. Of the most recent work are Sverre Bagge, *From Gang Leader to the Lord's Anointed: Kingship in 'Sverris saga' and 'Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar'*, The Viking Collection, 8 (Odense: Odense University Press, 1996), pp. 15–88; Aaron Gurevich, 'From Saga to Personality: *Sverris saga*', in *From Sagas to Society*, ed. by Gísli Pálsson, pp. 77–88.

²⁷ Bagge, *From Gang Leader*, p. 69: 'the saga entirely reflects the attitude of professional warriors, who had a bad relationship to the ordinary people'.

A characteristic of *Sverris saga* is that there are few women characters in the story. Sverrir himself is not portrayed as a ladies' man, and the women in his family are only shadows. As will be discussed below, this is in contrast to other saga literature, where women are much more prominent. There could be various explanations for this dearth of female characters. Much of the action takes place on the battlefield, where women were not present. This would be a contributing factor to women remaining in the background. Another explanation would be that women had less opportunity for controlling the political sphere as royal power increased.²⁸ A third aspect was that the author of the saga consciously marginalized the significance of women.²⁹ My sense is that women had more or less the same role for the Birkibeinar as they did for warriors in the *hirð* of the eleventh century, but have been given less of a presence in *Sverris saga* partly because Sverrir did not have court skalds, partly because the Birkibeinar seem to have been more dependent on honour bestowed through the king than through the household, and partly because the saga author may have sought to play down the role of women in order to place Sverrir's war in the context of the contemporary rhetoric surrounding military brotherhoods.³⁰

To get an understanding of the place of women in relation to a twelfth-century military brotherhood, we shall take a brief detour to the contemporary *Jómsvíkinga saga* before coming back for a closer look at *Sverris saga*. The Jómsvíkings attempted to create a self-contained society founded on loyalty, warrior honour, and the exclusion of women, not unlike the milieu of the Birkibeinar. *Jómsvíkinga saga* was written at the end of the twelfth century, probably by an Icelander, and quickly became popular throughout Scandinavia.³¹ *Jómsvíkinga saga* can, therefore, describe how warrior ideals and women were seen in a military society at the time the Birkibeinar and King Sverrir were fighting for control of Norway.

The battle of Hjörungavágr in 986 is central to *Jómsvíkinga saga*. According to tradition, the Jómsvíkings were sent to Norway by the Danish king to punish the

²⁸ Lien, 'Fra krigerflokk', pp. 156–59.

²⁹ Hans Jacob Orning, 'Fra egging til degging? Kvinner i saga og samfunn i norsk høymiddelalder', *Middelalderforum*, 2 (1997), 36–48 (pp. 40–42).

³⁰ This argument is developed in Bandlien, 'Impact of the Templars', and Bjørn Bandlien, 'Olavskrigere og jomsvikinger: Norske broderskap omkring 1200', in *Broderlisten, Broderskab og Korstog: Bidrag til opklaringen af en gåde fra dansk højmiddelalder*, ed. by Janus Møller Jensen (forthcoming).

³¹ See John Megaard, 'Studier i *Jómsvíkinga sagas* stemma: *Jómsvíkinga sagas* fem redaksjoner sammenlignet med versjonene i *Fagrskinna*, *Jómsvíkingadrápa*, *Heimskringla* og *Saxo*', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 115 (2000), 125–82, on the relation between the different versions of this saga. He argues that a written version may have existed as early as the 1180s, early enough for Bishop Bjarni Kolbeinsson on the Orkneys to use it in his *Jómsvíkingadrápa*. On Bjarni's version, see chapter 5 below. On the importance of this saga to Icelandic fictional literature, see Torfi H. Tulinius, *The Matter of the North: The Rise of Literary Fiction in Thirteenth-Century Iceland*, The Viking Collection, 12 (Odense: Odense University Press, 2002), pp. 195–96.

obstinate Earl Hákon Sigurðarson. Parallel to the main conflict between the Danes and Norwegians, the saga also narrates the combat between the Jómsviking Vagn Ákason and his adversary during the battle. He had made a *heitstrenging* (a vow to be fulfilled on pain of death) before the battle. The vow was twofold: firstly, he would fight Earl Hákon as long as his kinsman, Búi, was still with him; and secondly, he would kill the Norwegian chieftain Þorkell leira and go to bed with his daughter Ingibjörg without consulting her family.³² Vagn fulfilled his vow in a heroic fashion. He was pardoned after the battle and was able to marry Ingibjörg. Another Jómsviking was less fortunate in his vow to go to bed with Þóra Skagadóttir, Earl Hákon's wife. After the battle, Earl Hákon ordered the man beheaded without delay: 'Strike this one down fast. He has long had evil intentions.'³³

Was the motivation to win a beloved or to dishonour her father? Whether Vagn knew Ingibjörg before the Norwegian campaign is not mentioned, and it is striking that their love story has not been given a place in the saga. It seems completely irrelevant in that context. The portrayal of the young Jómsvikings idealized the warrior who wins a woman without her father's and kinsmen's consent. There is a connection between honour-laden combat in battle and getting into bed with one of the enemy's women afterwards. In war, love was permissible as a form of conquest.

As we have seen, such a norm was closely connected with social boundary lines. In the light of notions about the relative sexual freedom of chieftains, Vagn Ákason's *heitstrenging* is a problem because it implies a social superiority over Þorkell. By vowing to have a sexual relationship with Þorkell's daughter, Vagn distinguishes himself as a better warrior. That he later also marries the girl and takes over Þorkell's position as the Earl's right-hand man only makes Vagn more impressive in the eyes of a young Birkibein. Vagn's personal victory was secured through the marriage, even though the Jómsvikings lost to the Norwegians.

At the same time, the saga presents the brotherhood of the Jómsvikings as ideal. When Pálnatóki receives the territory of Jóm from the Wendish king Búrizleifr, he swears oaths for himself and the men who follow him. They are bound to avenge one another, and bonds of kinship are nullified to prevent them from competing with the bonds of loyalty. Moreover, no man is to bring a woman into the fortress. As long as these terms are kept, things go well for the Jómsvikings.

However, they are defeated at Hjørungavágr by the Norwegians. One of the first Jómsvikings to withdraw from the battle is Earl Sigvaldi, followed by Búi. Vagn Ákason is furious and accuses them of being more interested in spending time with their mistresses than in fighting:

³² Jvs, p. 78. A similar episode is told in *Landnámabók*; Holmsteinn, son of an earl, makes a promise to have a certain Helga Ornsdóttir as his wife, or no one at all. People judged this ill, and ultimately it led to enmity between him and his former friends (Lnd ch. 6).

³³ Jvs, p. 106. Snorri omits this episode, but mentions that Þóra Skagadóttir was a very attractive woman that Earl Hákon loved very much (Hkr:Óst ch. 19).

Sigvaldi hefr setta
 sjalfa oss und kylfu,
 en fárhugaðr fnauði
 fór heim til Danmarkar,
 hyggir í faðm at falla
 fljótt vinkonu sinni,
 en fyr borð et breiða
 Búi gekk með hugrekki. (Skj B, I, 175; Jvs, p. 96)

Sigvaldi has set us under the hard hammer, while the scared-minded villain ran home to Denmark; he hopes to soon fall into the lap of his mistress, while the brave Búi jumped overboard.

Of course, Vagn himself is determined to get into bed with the daughter of Þorkell leira. Unlike his comrades, he manages to preserve the warrior ideal and win the woman too. Sigvaldi does the opposite; he seeks refuge in a woman's arms at the cost of the Jómsvikings' ideals. For Vagn, there is no contradiction in pursuing a chieftain's daughter while scorning the abandon with which other men seek women's embraces. Through Vagn, the saga portrays women and the associated status of chieftain as a trophy the warrior must win on the battlefield. But the military brotherhood at Jómsborg is constructed as a masculine space where women are a threat to the warriors' toughness.

Vagn's story was apparently very popular in the Norwegian *hirð* milieu of the late twelfth century. One of the ways the Birkibeinar get the upper hand over Magnús Erlingsson's peasant army is by remaining so loyal to their comrades and their king that they do not allow women to distract them when it counts most. Sverrir plays on this when he exhorts his men before the battle of Ilevollene in 1180. He says that Magnús's warriors are more interested in being with women than fighting to the death for their lord. He puts this verse in the mouths of his adversaries:

Ætlak mér ena mæru,
 munnfagra Jórinni [or: Ingunni],
 hvégis fundr með frægjum
 ferr Magnúsi ok Sverri. (Skj B, I, 596; Svs ch. 47)

I set my mind on a maiden, the fair Jórinn; go as it like with the meeting Magnús has with Sverrir.

Nevertheless, it is an ideal among the Birkibeinar to win the enemy's women after a victory. This comes out in Sverrir's strategy after Magnús Erlingsson's fall at Fimreite in 1184. He lets his own men assume the positions held by Magnús's fallen chieftains. Many low-born warriors become powerful figures, and many also inherited their adversaries' wives.³⁴ It certainly cannot be ruled out that Sverrir and the Birkibeinar knew of Vagn Ákason's amazing story and related it to their own actions and situations. Marriages contracted through conquest of Norway contributed to the

³⁴ Svs ch. 100.

Birkibeinar newcomers being able to raise their social status by assuming new titles and lands.

In 1184, it was clear that King Sverrir used traditional warrior attitudes to pacify his warriors and solidify his victory over his opponents. The victory over Magnús Erlingsson and his chieftains must have been the realization of a dream for some of the men who had been with Sverrir from the beginning. In general, the social status of the Birkibeinar was raised, and the way this was effected has echoes of the ideals we encountered in the skaldic verses from before 1150. The marriages are a confirmation that their qualities as good warriors are appreciated; they had earned the estates, women, and social position they now received. *Sverris saga* is less concerned about what the widows felt about their new husbands; it was fundamental to the warrior ideal that a woman *had* to love the best warrior, even if he had killed her father or husband. These warriors were not interested in the emotional bond between husband and wife which is expected of a modern marriage, but in social recognition manifested in the capability of going to bed with their enemy's women. In this instance, the negative consequence of the heroic love concept for women becomes clear. In a time when the *hirð* was beginning to be an important springboard to positions of power, it seems likely that Vagn Ákason represented an ideal for young, ambitious warriors.

After 1184, however, much evidence points to Sverrir advancing a new sexual morality among the Birkibeinar. The Norwegian kings before Sverrir had had relationships with many women, if we are to believe the latter part of *Heimskringla*. Sigurðr munnr (d. 1155) was known for his many extramarital affairs.³⁵ Haraldr gilli was in the arms of his mistress when he was murdered in 1136.³⁶ Magnús Erlingsson was described after his death as a 'great womanizer' (*kvenna-maðr mikill*).³⁷ A single exception in the civil war period was Sverrir. *Sverris saga* mentions no extramarital affairs. On his deathbed, the King swore that he had no other sons than Hákon, no matter how many might come and claim otherwise.³⁸ Thus, there are many indications that he consciously tried to avoid the strife that children of such liaisons could lead to in the next generation, and that in doing so he renounced any claim to control over women as a symbol of his and the Birkibeinar's power.

³⁵ Hkr:Hss ch. 18.

³⁶ Hkr:MsbHg chs 15–16; Fsk ch. 81.

³⁷ Svs ch. 99. The abundance of royal pretenders — real or false — in the twelfth century indicates that kings usually had children outside wedlock. Only after the marriage of Hákon Hákonsson in 1226 did accession by legitimate children become the norm; see generally Jenny M. Jochens, 'The Politics of Reproduction: Medieval Norwegian Kingship', *American Historical Review*, 92 (1987), 327–49.

³⁸ Svs ch. 193. Still, a man named Erlingr came from the Faroe Islands to Norway in 1210 and claimed to be an illegitimate son of Sverrir, presumably procreated before Sverrir left the islands. Erlingr was even recognized by Kristín Sverrisdóttir (Bgls, p. 122). He died during bloodletting shortly after.

After the battle of Fimreite in 1184, it was Sverrir himself who arranged the granting of lands and women to his warriors. In peacetime, such relationships could easily become a problem for a king who wished to maintain control over his men. In Sverrir's well-known speech against drunkenness, held not too long after the victory at Fimreite, it is clear that he is attempting to calm his warriors and change their ideals now that victory over Magnús Erlingsson has been attained. Sverrir needed his men to be courageous in battle, but able to abstain from violence in other contexts; they 'should be as lambs in peacetime, but ferocious as lions when there is war'.³⁹ The problems of *kvennamál* (literally 'matters relating to women')⁴⁰ and drunkenness in the *hirð* are addressed separately in this speech. Sverrir does not like the fact that his men took other men's wives as a result of drunkenness and idle living in the towns. Too much strong drink leads to the desire to commit sins, including taking other men's women.

The speech against drunkenness shows strong influence from Christian morality. That Magnús Erlingsson previously had been called a heavy drinker and a womanizer indicates that there is a conscious attempt in the saga to highlight Sverrir's moral superiority as king.⁴¹ The speech also reflects the point of view of a military and political leader. An uneventful life in town punctuated by heavy drinking is detrimental for warriors' morale and unity. The speech reflects the problems that are created when large numbers of warriors are assembled in one place.

There are a number of indications that many regarded the lack of military discipline as a far-reaching problem at the end of the twelfth century. *Orkneyinga saga* describes the trouble in Kirkjubágr in the winter of 1150. Many warriors, including some from Norway, had assembled with Earl Rognvaldr kali to go on a crusade in the spring. Disputes quickly broke out, some of which involved women.⁴² It was only by direct intervention by the Earl himself and payment of compensation from his own pocket that blood feuds were avoided. How serious such a *kvennamál* could become in Orkney is illustrated by Þórbjörn klerkr Þórsteinsson's activities at about the same time. He had made trouble for Rognvaldr kali, and hid in Caithness in Scotland. There, Þórbjörn and his men did as they pleased and committed killings and *kvennamál*.⁴³ Although Þórbjörn klerkr is not depicted unequivocally in a negative light, he remains a warrior of the old school.⁴⁴ These examples show that *kvennamál* was relatively

³⁹ Svs ch. 104.

⁴⁰ *Kvennamál* is defined in Cleasby and Vigfusson's *Icelandic-English Dictionary* as 'love matters' in the earlier *Orkneyinga saga* reference, and as 'rape or fornication' in the later instance.

⁴¹ Svs ch. 98.

⁴² Os ch. 85 on *kvennamál*.

⁴³ Os ch. 100.

⁴⁴ Os ch. 77; see also Marlene Ciklamini, 'Saint Rognvaldr and Sveinn Ásleifarson, the Viking', *Scandinavian Studies*, 42 (1970), 50–57.

common at the end of the twelfth century, but also that it was increasingly associated with general lawlessness. Use of force against women was regarded as a threat to the security and stability of society. Even the Danish crusaders did not manage to abstain from such activities. In the *Historia de profectione Danorum in Hierosolymam*, written in Tübingen c. 1200, we read that they were enticed to drunkenness and debauchery while at port in Bergen. The next day they were found to be guilty of laying a hand on a woman of high rank, and that in an extremely uncourteous way.⁴⁵ Foolish use of strong drink is here, as in Sverrir's speech against drunkenness, contrasted with common sense, moderation, and self-control. The ideal *hirð* member was warlike only when he had to be, and was otherwise to be a loyal servant of the king who did not cause trouble in the community or reflect shame on his leader.

Sverris saga also relates the consequences that resulted when one of Sverrir's men, Earl Philippús Birgisson, seduced the young and beautiful wife of the priest Erlendr.⁴⁶ Erlendr then tried to kill as many Birkibeinar as he could. Erlendr saw Philippús's relationship with his wife as a part of the struggle going on between the Birkibeinar and the Baglers, the clerical party. Despite King Sverrir's opposition, Philippús takes the priest's wife as his own and keeps her at Aker Farm in Oslo. Afterwards she is called the Earl's mistress rather than the priest's wife. During a visit to the woman, Philippús is ambushed by the Baglers and killed wearing only his underwear. It is primarily because the Earl is indiscreet and the relationship could lead to great damage to the Birkibeinar that Sverrir advises Philippús against the visits. In other words, Sverrir wants greater control over his men more than he wants to exploit his enemy's women in battle. Philippús's liaison with the woman puts himself and his comrades in danger. He remains the weak link in the *hirð*, and this does not sit well with Sverrir's tactical way of thinking. In this light, Sverrir's speech against drunkenness becomes an expression of the way a new type of kingship expected warriors to conduct themselves, including their behaviour towards women.

In summary we can say that *Sverris saga* is where the old warrior ideal confronts a king's need for obedient warriors. After gaining sole rulership of Norway in 1184, Sverrir tried to urge his warriors to abstain from exploiting other men's women, creating unnecessary conflict in the towns. We must also remember that the saga is the product of a collaboration between Sverrir himself and Abbot Karl Jónsson. The spiritual ideal that men should not let themselves be led into lusting after women might have been an obvious means for the two men to use to pacify the peacetime *hirð*. Sverrir may have sought to portray himself as a good example for his warriors, and at the same time give an impression that he was attempting to improve the morals of the monarchy in general.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Prof ch. 11.

⁴⁶ Svs ch. 160.

⁴⁷ Sverrir's goal seems to have been to surpass even Norwegian clerics concerning drinking and women; cf. Bandlien, 'Impact of the Templars'. Papal letters show that he did not convince all of this.

Nevertheless, there is little evidence that Sverrir's ideals and admonitions in themselves changed warrior morals to any great degree. We have already seen examples of instances when members of the *hirð* 'forgot themselves'. In *Boglunga sǫgur*, a Bagler chieftain called Jón dróttning slept with the wife of the farmer Þrándr at the beginning of the thirteenth century:

He [Jón] came to a peasant called Þrándr, who had a beautiful wife. Jón invited them to come and talk to him in a certain loft. The wife went in first, then Jón. He turned towards the peasant, pushed him out and locked the door. When the peasant complained, Jón made up a false accusation against him and let him be tied up to the tail of a horse and dragged to the ship in this manner. He freed himself with half a mark of gold, and had to be satisfied with that. [. . .] He [Jón] went to church accompanied by one man. But Þrándr and seven other men were close by and watched where he went. Then they ran to the church. Jón ran into the choir. Þrándr threw a spear after him, wounding him. Jón ran out through the choir door and Þrándr after him. They slayed him in a field and Þrándr cut off his head [. . .]. Gunnbjörn, Jón's brother, and Sölvi Disarson avenged him later, killing nine men and cutting the feet off seven.⁴⁸

The powerful chieftain here exploited his social position to use another man's wife, but had to pay with his life. King Sverrir's tactical way of thinking did not have a significant effect in this instance. The episode shows that at the beginning of the thirteenth century as well, women's sexuality was understood in relation to social distinctions between men, and the judgement of Jón's deed was not regarded in terms of a breach of Christian morality, but of dishonouring of her husband.

Such a use of women continued during the reign of King Hákon Hákonarson (1217–63). In the spring of 1237, Bárðr Ísaksbróðir raped the wife of Þórðr Friðreks-son.⁴⁹ The motive for the rape was apparently to dishonour Þórðr, as the men were on opposite sides in the conflict between Earl Skúli and King Hákon. Þórðr was a good friend of King Hákon, while Bárðr was Skúli's man. The deed was punished swiftly; the King's men killed Bárðr shortly after, and Þórðr killed Hákon dúfa, a man who had assisted in the rape. The author of *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, Sturla Þórðarson, wanted to portray the rape as a morally repugnant deed in a Christian sense and has Earl Skúli just as outraged about the rape as King Hákon. But when

⁴⁸ Bgls, pp. 49–50 (E): 'Hann kom til þess búandi, er Þrándr hét. Hann átti konu fríða. Jón kallaði þau á tal í lopt eitt. Gekk húsfreyja fyrri. Ok er hon kom í loptit, þá snörisk hann við bónda ok hratt honum út, en lét apr loptit. En er búandi talði at þessu, þá hoetti Jón honum sǫkum ok lét taka hann ok binda við hrosshala. Fluttu hann svá til skips. Hann leysti sik hálfri mörk gulls, ok varð því feginn. [. . .] Gekk hann upp til kirkju snemma einn morgin ok annarr maðr með honum. En Þrándr ok þeir .vij. saman lágu þar skammt frá ok sá til ferða hans. Þá hljópu þeir til kirkjunnar. Jón hljóp innar í sǫnghúsit. Þrándr skaut spjóti at Jóni. Hljóp Jón þá út um sǫnghúsit en Þrándr eptir honum, ok felldu hann á akrinum. Hjó Þrándr þá hǫfuð af honum [. . .]. Gunnbjörn, bróðir hans, ok Sölvi Disarson hefndu hans ok drápu .ix. menn, en fóthjoggu .vij.'

⁴⁹ HH ch. 192.

Bárðr and Hákon dúfa were killed by the King's men, Skúli was greatly opposed to the killings, although he did not let on as much to King Hákon.⁵⁰ Skúli's attitude to Bárðr's rape resembles the thinking behind the vengeance or killing of Jón dróttning in *Boglunga sögur*. Hákon's attitude does not need to have been fundamentally different; for him, the rape could be interpreted as a humiliation-power demonstration, which must be avenged since it affected one of his men.⁵¹ The saga's treatment of the episode, however, reveals an interpretation of rape as a moral offence which the king has to punish.

These episodes, then, do not offer a foundation for believing that Sverrir's condemnation of violence against women by warriors had much effect on the *hirð* culture of the late twelfth century. A warrior attitude can clearly be traced in the stories of Jón dróttning and Bárðr Ísaksbróðir; control over another man's women created or reinforced social distinction. At the same time, court poetry of the eleventh century showed that acknowledgement by women was a symbol of men's vulnerability to public opinion. After his victory in 1184, Sverrir represented a different attitude to women; they ceased to have a part in the warrior's life. In *Sverris saga*, women's recognition of men is eventually deconstructed into insignificance; for the Birki-beinar, as for the Jómsvikings, the *hirð* was to be a purely masculine space.

However, another movement was to prove far more effective than Sverrir's admonitions to his warriors about leaving women alone. Not content to admonish warriors and devalue their conduct to women in peacetime, the cult of chivalry also offered an attractive alternative which included women: courtly love. The introduction and adaptation of this ideology into Norwegian aristocratic culture will be examined later. In the next chapter we will turn to Iceland, where the sources for the social dynamics of love within a household context are more clearly set forth.

⁵⁰ HH ch. 193.

⁵¹ Hans Jacob Orning, 'Håkon Håkonsson, Skule Bårdsson og norsk statsdannelse i første halvdel av 1200-tallet', *Historisk Tidsskrift*, 76 (1997), 2–19.

Dangerous Liaisons

Medieval Iceland is famous for its feuding and vengeance killings. But what was all the fighting about? In the sagas, conflicts were surprisingly often rooted in love stories.¹ It has even been said that composing love poetry for a woman seems to have been the major cause of death for young men in Iceland.² How important was love in Icelandic society? Historians have long stressed the significance of personal bonds through kinship, friendship, and matrimonial alliances. The social implications created by a relationship based on love, on the other hand, have often been neglected, even though the literature indicates that Icelanders were very much concerned with the significance of desire to men's identity and the power ratio between different families.

This chapter will cover the period up to the first decades of the thirteenth century, primarily based on the contemporary sagas and sagas of Icelanders which were written down around 1200. At this time, Icelandic society had undergone a shift in the balance of power in favour of a few families, and there began to be greater differences between chieftains and free farmers.³ The society we encounter in many of the sagas of Icelanders, on the other hand, is based on a balance of power between free farmers and on the defence of one's personal honour.⁴ The tensions in these

¹ Theodore M. Andersson, *The Icelandic Saga: An Analytic Reading*, Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature, 28 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), pp. 12–13: 'though we think of the sagas as being the least romantic literature imaginable, it remains a fact that love is the most frequent cause of conflict.'

² Roberta Frank, *Old Norse Court Poetry: The Dróttkvætt Stanza*, *Islandica*, 42 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), p. 166.

³ Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, *Chieftains and Power in the Icelandic Commonwealth*, The Viking Collection, 12 (Odense: Odense University Press, 1999).

⁴ Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, *Fortælling og ære: Studier i islændingesagaerne* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1995); Gerd Wolfgang Weber, 'Irreligiosität und Heldenzeitalter: Zum

sagas most often relate to how this balance is disturbed, the conflicts that follow, and how social equilibrium is restored.⁵ Thus, in these two saga genres we encounter two different social contexts in which the social logic of romance is played out. In the sagas of Icelanders, the action is set in the somewhat idealized society in which saga writers imagined their ancestors to have lived. In the contemporary sagas, however, the social differences between the actors are thought to have been greater, and the contexts closer to those of the saga writer. Nevertheless, saga writers' constructions of the past were indicative of how they viewed the actions of their own contemporaries. Men and women of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries could be compared with mythological or heroic characters such as Freyr, Guðrún Gjúkadóttir, or Hrólfkraki. Young men fighting for their chieftains tried to die as honourably as they imagined their forefathers did.⁶ Thus, I shall not use the sagas of Icelanders as sources for the physical and social realities of Icelanders either in the Viking Age or for the time around 1200, but to demonstrate the social logic that formed a frame of reference for love relationships which affected Icelanders' actions during the time these sagas were being written.

Therefore, this chapter will begin with a look at the social logic of love in the sagas of Icelanders so that they may then be compared with the scarcer love stories in the contemporary sagas. First, though, it will be useful to examine briefly the two institutions in Icelandic society which were extremely important both for the organization of society and for individuals' ideas of themselves: the household and kinship.

The Significance of Kinship and the Household for the Individual

Traditionally, Scandinavian medieval society has been called a 'kinship society'. 'Kin' has seldom been defined more specifically than as a broad form of family relationship. Ideas about kinship's sweeping significance have often been connected firstly to stipulations in the law about the obligation to avenge or pay fines for one's kin, secondly to the presumed large number of people who lived on the same farm, and thirdly to the need for kinship solidarity in a pre-state period.⁷

Mythencharacter der altisländischen Literatur', in *Speculum Norrænum: Norse Studies in Memory of Gabriel Turville-Petre*, ed. by Ursula Dronke and others (Odense: Odense University Press, 1981), pp. 474–505; Kirsten Hastrup, 'Defining a Society: The Icelandic Free State Between Two Worlds', *Scandinavian Studies*, 56 (1984), 235–55.

⁵ Jesse L. Byock, *Feud in the Icelandic Saga* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

⁶ Guðrún Nordal, *Ethics and Action in Thirteenth-Century Iceland*, The Viking Collection, 11 (Odense: Odense University Press, 1998).

⁷ See Lars Hamre, 'Ætt, Noreg', *KLNM*, xx (1976), cols 587–91, for a critical review of the uses of the 'ættesamfunn'.

More recent studies have shown that the medieval Norse kinship structure was bilateral.⁸ This means that a kinship group would include both the mother's and the father's family. Thus, every single individual except for full siblings had a specific kinship group. Simultaneously, the individual's kinship group overlapped with a number of other social networks. New bonds were created by marriage. Friendship and concubinage were other important institutions which created bonds of loyalty which had to be taken into account.⁹ Of course, women also had an important role in these networks. Through marriage, they united different kinship networks. A married woman continued to be a member of her own kinship group and could, as we will see, enter into independent alliances that could conflict with her husband's interests.

Even if there was a feeling of loyalty towards one's close kin, these crisscrossing bonds of loyalty could work against the formation of strong kinship units. Families could often find themselves on either side of a conflict: where should a man's loyalty be committed when a cousin of his paternal uncle and a nephew of his wife's cousin are in a fight? In such cases, circumstances other than the formal degrees of kinship might determine whom he decides to support. The side a man supported could vary in every situation, often for strategic reasons. Helping a second cousin who was a chieftain could be more profitable than taking the side of a first cousin who was poor.¹⁰

⁸ E.g. David Gaunt, *Familjeliv i Norden* (Malmö: Gidlund, 1983); Kirsten Hastrup, *Culture and History in Medieval Iceland: An Anthropological Analysis of Structure and Change* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985); Agnes S. Arnórsdóttir, *Konur og vígamenn: Staða kynjanna á Íslandi á 12. og 13. öld*, Sagnfræðirannsóknir, 12 (Reykjavík: Sagnfræðistofnun, Háskóla Íslands, 1995); William Ian Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking: Feud, Law, and Society in Saga Iceland* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1990); Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, *Saga and Society: An Introduction to Old Norse Literature*, Studia Borealia, 1 (Odense: Odense University Press, 1993); Lars Ivar Hansen, 'Slektskap, eiendom og sosiale strategier i nordisk middelalder', *Collegium Medievale*, 7 (1994), 103–54; Hansen, "'Ætten" i de eldste landskapslovene – Realitet, konstruksjon og strategi', in *Norm og praksis i middelaldersamfunnet*, ed. by Else Mundal and Ingvild Øye, Kulturtekster, 14 (Bergen: Senter for europeiske kulturstudier, 1999), pp. 23–55.

⁹ Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, 'Friendship in the Icelandic Commonwealth', in *From Sagas to Society: Comparative Approaches to Early Iceland*, ed. by Gísli Pálsson (Enfield Lock: Hisarlik Press, 1992), pp. 205–15; Auður Magnúsdóttir, *Frillor och fruar: Politik och samlevnad på Island, 1120–1400*, Avhandlingar från Historiska institutionen i Göteborg, 29 (Gothenburg: Historiska institutionen, University of Gothenburg, 2001).

¹⁰ Icelanders did not expect a man to support a relative beyond the third degree. Powerful men would more easily attract kinsmen that could benefit from their relationship; see Miller, *Bloodtaking*, pp. 155–78. When the law sections of the twelfth century presume a loyalty to kin extending to the seventh degree, that should more readily be interpreted as an attempt of systematization of social obligations through the construction of stable kin groups; see especially Michael H. Gelting, 'Marriage, Peace and the Canonical Incest Prohibitions: Making Sense of an Absurdity?', in *Nordic Perspectives on Medieval Canon Law*, ed. by Mia Korpiola, Publications of Matthias Calonius Society, 2 (Saarijärvi: Matthias Calonius Society, 1999), pp. 93–124, but also Miller, *Bloodtaking*, pp. 145–47.

Because the kinship structure has certain weaknesses as a social organization, the household has been emphasized as a more important institution.¹¹ The household is usually characterized as an assemblage of people who live together, produce food together, eat together, and have finances in common. At the centre of the Icelandic household was the married couple (*hjún*). The household might also contain children (illegitimate, legitimate, and foster children), other relatives, concubines, temporary workers, and slaves. As a rule the husband had the role of head of the household. He was liable if a slave committed a crime, he had the right to give his daughters in marriage, and he represented the household at the Thing. If he died, his widow could function as the head of the household, but could not appear formally at the Thing as an independent agent.¹² Otherwise one of the sons assumed the role of head, but we should note that daughters inherited before more distant male relatives. For the head of household, it was important for all members to be loyal and for members of other households to respect his integrity and power over the members of his household. This has to do with the honour of the head of household in the eyes of society.

The significance of honour in Iceland has been the subject of recent studies by the literary historian Preben Meulengracht Sørensen and the social historian William Ian Miller. While Meulengracht Sørensen has focused on the role of honour in the valuation of people and actions in the *sagas of Icelanders*, Miller has tried to show how honour functioned in Icelandic society from the settlement to the beginning of the thirteenth century. However, their descriptions of the character and function of honour are not too different.

Free men did not make compromises with others who tried to diminish their rights or honour in society; after all, the symbolic significance of settlement for the Icelanders of the thirteenth century was that their ancestors managed to escape the growing desire of the Norwegian kings to subjugate the land in the ninth and tenth centuries.¹³ Honour, therefore, was closely associated with self-assertion and social position. Public opinion did have great significance, however. In other words, honour in the sagas is the value a person has both in his own eyes and in those of society.¹⁴ All actions are viewed in terms of honour: 'Status had to be carefully maintained or aggressively acquired: one's status depended on the condition of one's honour, for it was in the game of honour that rank and reputation were attained and retained. Honour was at stake at virtually every social interaction.'¹⁵ This allowed individuals

¹¹ Miller, *Bloodtaking*, pp. 111–37; Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, 'Forholdet mellom frender, hushold og venner på Island i fristatstiden', *Historisk Tidsskrift*, 74 (1995), 311–30.

¹² Grg, Ib, 29; cf. F XI 2; G 51. The head of the household also received compensation if someone had sexual relations with a woman in the household; see Grg, Ia, 164; II, 331; III, 431, 673.

¹³ Meulengracht Sørensen, *Fortælling*, pp. 144–47.

¹⁴ Meulengracht Sørensen, *Fortælling*, p. 187.

¹⁵ Miller, *Bloodtaking*, p. 29.

to submit themselves to the norms of society more easily, while at the same time showing their honour through their actions. A man could do this by refusing to respect another's integrity in order to achieve honour for himself. One who followed such a strategy was called an *ójafnaðarmaðr*, literally a 'man who creates unbalance'. If a man won honour through an action, it meant implicitly that he had taken honour from another. Honour was in short supply, so young men who sought to obtain honour for themselves were obliged to challenge others. To challenge another man's honour was not negative in and of itself, but could create new status relationships between different persons and households. By the same token, it was a positive ideal to be a *drengr góðr* ('good man'), since it included the ability to defend one's own integrity against challengers. We will see in this chapter that the connection of love with violence was closely associated with the understanding of honour.

The Threat of Seduction

Kormáks saga tells the fascinating love story of the skald Kormákr Ögmundarson and Steingerðr, daughter of Þorkell í Tungu. Steingerðr is fostered at Gnúpsdal, and Kormákr often stops by there to see her. As soon as Steingerðr's father hears of the visits, he has her sent home to him. Þorkell thinks it necessary, for 'it seemed to him that there was a prospect of dishonour to himself and his daughter, if Kormákr would not make the situation more definite'.¹⁶ Kormákr nevertheless persists in his visits to Steingerðr at her father's house as well, but shows no sign of wanting to marry her. Þorkell tries first to take control of the situation by locking his daughter up. When this measure does not keep Kormákr away, Þorkell tries to have him killed.

If Kormákr had wished, he could have asked Þorkell formally for Steingerðr's hand in marriage. The saga shows through Þorkell's words that Kormákr would have obtained his beloved if he had gone through a formal courtship. We get the impression that Kormákr does not *want* to get married; all he wants is to continue his relationship with Steingerðr. Perhaps he is waiting to see if he can find a better match later; Kormákr's mother indicates that there is a significant difference in fortune between Kormákr and Steingerðr. On Steingerðr's earnest urging, Kormákr asks for her hand anyway, and with the help of some good men an agreement is reached with Þorkell about a marriage. Kormákr, however, does not show up to the wedding. Steingerðr's family interprets this as a severe insult.¹⁷ Kormákr's absence can be

¹⁶ Krm ch. 4: 'ok þykkir sér horfa til óvirðingar ok dóttur sinni, ef Kormákr vill þetta eigi meir festa'.

¹⁷ Krm ch. 6: 'Þetta þykkir frændum Steingerðar óvirðing, er hann bregðr þessum ráðahag.' The failure of Kormákr to show up at the wedding is only vaguely explained in the saga. It places part of the blame on financial disagreements, but most on the curse of the sorceress Þórveig. Several scholars have argued that Kormákr was in fact sexually impotent, but that is only one of several possible readings.

read as a reluctance on his part to marry 'beneath him': he wants to have a relationship with Steingerðr without worrying about her family's autonomy and honour. Seen in the light of the mythological poems, the audience of the sagas might have seen Kormákr as a seducer of Óðinn's calibre, while Steingerðr's family want to avoid a role as peripheral and subordinate *jǫtnir*. Þorkell has to take action. He is not powerful enough to avenge the insult directly, as Kormákr is a superior fighter. He seeks to solve the problem another way: he marries Steingerðr off to another man, Bersi. It now becomes Bersi's job to control Steingerðr and thereby his own integrity as head of household against Kormákr. At the same time, Þorkell shows his power to decide on his daughter's marriage after all; he chooses a strategy where he manages to retain much of the honour he was in danger of losing if he had settled for Kormákr's reluctance to become his son-in-law.

The love story in *Kormáks saga* is by no means unique among the sagas of Icelanders. Sagas like *Hallfreðar saga*, *Bjarnar saga*, and *Fóstbræðra saga* have the same pattern as a main theme, and it is also found as a subtheme in a range of sagas. The theme is characterized by conflicts between a young man who visits and composes poetry about an unmarried woman, and her male relatives.¹⁸ The visits seldom lead to marriage, but remarkably often this is not due to any lack of will to let the woman marry. What is lacking rather is the will of the male visitor to take the woman as his wife. The woman is then married off to someone else, but the first man does not lose interest in her.

In the other saga from the early period which shares this pattern as its main motif, *Hallfreðar saga*, we find two similar sequences. Ingólfr Þorsteinsson is described as the handsomest man in northern Iceland. During an autumn feast, he gets to talking to one of the unmarried women there. She is called Valgerðr and is the daughter of the farmer Óttarr. After the feast Ingólfr returns often to speak to Valgerðr. Óttarr is not pleased. He would have accepted a courtship, however: 'I am not pleased by your visits, and you must have heard that I do not put up with offence or dishonour. You can marry her if you wish.'¹⁹ Ingólfr replies that he decides for himself what he will do and does not care what Óttarr thinks. Of course this leads to conflict.

Óttarr's son, Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld ('troublesome poet'), was not much better than his father's enemy. The saga tells that he 'set his heart on Kolfinna Ávaldadóttir, but that was not to Ávaldi's liking; he would have given him his daughter's hand, but Hallfreðr did not want to marry.'²⁰ Hallfreðr's lack of interest in pursuing a

¹⁸ Jenny M. Jochens, 'The Illicit Love Visit: An Archaeology of Old Norse Sexuality', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 1 (1991), 357–92.

¹⁹ Hall ch. 3: 'Eigi gezk mér at kvámum þínum, ok spurt muntu þat hafa, at vér höfum eigi setit um skapraunir eða skammir; muntu komask at ráðahag við hana, ef þú vill.'

²⁰ Hall ch. 3: 'Hann lagði hug á Kolfinnu Ávaldadóttur, en Ávalda var lítit um þat ok vildi gipta honum dóttur sína, en Hallfreðr vildi eigi kvænask.' See Robert Cook, 'The Order of the Wooing Episodes in *Hallfreðar saga*', in *Úr Dölum til Dala: Guðbrandur Vigfússon Centenary Essays*, ed. by Rory McTurk and Andrew Wawn, Leeds Texts and Monographs,

courtship is clearly not indicative of a lack of love for Kolfinna. Instead, he could be interpreted as not considering Ávaldi a worthy father-in-law. A complicating factor here is the relationship between Ávaldi and Óttarr. They had grown up as foster-brothers in Norway before coming to Iceland at the same time. Now Hallfreðr is behaving very arrogantly to Ávaldi, thus endangering the latter's honour. Even if Óttarr and Ávaldi were foster-brothers, the saga suggests right from the beginning that Óttarr was the better of the two. Nevertheless, the point is that here, as in heroic poetry, the balance is first tipped when differences between the two men are made clear. Hallfreðr's reluctance to marry the daughter of his father's foster-brother revealed to everyone that he did not see Ávaldi as a threat. He created an inequality between them; he acts here as an *ófafnaðarmaðr*.

Ávaldi chooses the same strategy as Þorkell in *Kormáks saga*. He marries Kolfinna off to the rich and popular Gríss Sæmingsson and lets him deal with the insult. But while Ávaldi and Gríss are negotiating about the marriage in the house, Hallfreðr and Kolfinna sit outside talking 'so that everybody that came out had to see it'.²¹ Hallfreðr *wants* to let Gríss and everyone else see him kiss Kolfinna to show that he has not given her up. Hallfreðr made himself a canker on the marriage, something Gríss had to choose to accept as part of the deal if he wanted to have Kolfinna.

These stories are related to two relationships which we can immediately link to the role of the *giptingarmaðr*, 'parent or guardian who gives in marriage', in Icelandic household structure. First, the stories relate to the fathers' personal integrity and honour in relation to the world in general. Visits to the daughter were not strictly necessary if the object had simply been to arrange a marriage. Valgerðr, Kolfinna, and Steingerðr are desirable women in their own right, but Ingólfr, Hallfreðr, and Kormákr have too little respect for the women's fathers to enter into a courtship. An episode in *Ljósvetninga saga* is a good illustration of what happened to a father's reputation if he accepted such treatment. A troublemaker named Sǫlmundr Viðarson often visited the daughter of the farmer Qlvir against the will of Qlvir and other family members. But the saga remarks that Qlvir is such a spineless man that Sǫlmundr could do whatever he wanted.²² This characteristic could be fatal in a transparent household society like that of Iceland. Qlvir fails to live up to the ideal of protecting his daughters and therefore does not fulfil the role of a free man. If the male visitor had respect for the woman's family he would ask her father for her hand, negotiations would be made, and mutual recognition would ensure that the households continued on an equal footing, thereby maintaining social balance. The young men's

n.s., 11 (Leeds: University of Leeds, 1989), pp. 65–91, on the different versions of this episode in the manuscripts.

²¹ Hall ch. 4: 'Hallfreðr setti hana í kné sér úti hjá dyngjuvegginum ok talaði svá við hana, at allir sá, þeir er út gengu.'

²² Ljós ch 1: 'Hann [Sǫlmundr] venr kvámur sínar til Qlvis at hitta dóttur hans, ok í mót vilja frænda hennar; ok fekksk þó engi forstaða af lítilmennsku fõður hennar.'

refusal to go through courtship indicates a social inequality which has to be combated if it is not to become permanent. This implicit social inequality in itself was something the characters and their society could live with; but the visits to the unmarried daughters make the distinctions explicit. This meant that romantic visits without the ultimate aim of marriage challenged the honour of the *giptingarmaðr* and with it the stability of society.

The second point, which is a consequence of the first, is that the presence of the visitor made it difficult to marry the daughter off elsewhere. Other possible bridegrooms would automatically have a problem with the man who visited their new wife. If the visitor was too powerful a man, it could mean that other suitors would shrink from a marriage with the daughter. Bersi in *Kormáks saga* hesitated for some time when he was offered Steingerðr; even though it was otherwise a good match, Kormákr's constant presence was a hindrance. Gríss in *Hallfreðar saga* expresses the same scepticism when Kolfinna is offered to him; she is a good marriage prospect except for the fact that an annoying man is included in the deal!

In *Fóstbræðra saga* the problem is articulated in a very pronounced way.²³ The skald Þormóðr Bersason visits the unmarried Þórdís and speaks to her long and often. Þórdís is the daughter of the prosperous widow Gríma, who is well versed in magic. Gríma turns a blind eye to these meetings until people begin to say that Þormóðr has seduced her. When these rumours reach Gríma, she asks Þormóðr to either start courting Þórdís or discontinue his visits. Gríma is afraid of both local gossip and the possibility that other young men who wanted to ask for Þórdís would not court her while they knew that Þormóðr was talking to her. The young seducer is preventing the daughter of the household from marrying another, and opportunities for successful courtship will pass her by. In the example of Óttarr's daughter Valgerðr, she is not married off until the family moves south and away from Íngolfr. Control over the daughter is transferred from the head of household to the male visitor. The woman's father is degraded as the giants are in mythological society.

Mansöngur – *Compelling Love Poems*

Men were not forbidden from visiting other households as such in the Icelandic collection of laws known as *Grágás*. It would have been difficult to effect such a ban in Icelandic society. The sexes were not isolated from each other before marriage to the same degree as they could be in other parts of Europe.²⁴ Parental control was largely based on discouraging men from seductions and the respect of the young people for the balance of honour.

²³ Fóst chs 9–10.

²⁴ See Georges Duby, 'The Courtly Model', in *Silences of the Middle Ages*, ed. by Catherine Klapisch-Zuber, *A History of Women*, 2 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 250–66 (p. 257).

In collections of laws from the Free State period, however, we do find a prohibition of *mansǫngr*, which is often translated as ‘love poetry’. As we shall see, this translation is not without basis in the saga material, but the poems were not as innocent as they might appear at first glance. According to two of the law codices of Grágás, composing *mansǫngr* could be punished by outlawry.²⁵ If the woman was twenty or older, she could prosecute the poet herself. If she was younger, it was up to her nearest male relative to bring the suit. If found guilty, the poet was put outside society’s protection, a state which in practice gave the woman’s *giptingarmaðr* or husband the right to kill the poet. The punishment was equally as strict as if the man had slept with another man’s daughter, sister, or wife (*legorð*).²⁶ While the provisions regarding *legorð* related to actual intercourse, the punishment for *mansǫngr* shows that expressions of love could themselves be seen as a threat. Why could *mansǫngr* be punished so severely? Was *mansǫngr* more than just an expression of love directed towards a woman?

Scholarly opinion on the reasons for the prohibition of *mansǫngr* have long been divided. The problem is that few examples of this type of poetry survive. It has been argued that this poetry was inspired by courtly ideals and was a new phenomenon in Iceland when the law was recorded in the twelfth century.²⁷ Jenny Jochens, on the other hand, believes that *mansǫngr* reflects a special type of poetry with ancient roots. For one thing, this poetic genre was characterized by insults directed at the woman’s *giptingarmaðr* or husband. The poem could still be an expression of genuine feelings for a woman, but it focused on challenging the woman’s household. Jochens said that the ban on *mansǫngr* reflected a coarse type of poem perhaps describing real or imaginary sexual pleasures with the woman against her father’s or husband’s will.²⁸

The etymology and legal contexts of the designation strongly support Jenny Jochens’s understanding. The prefix *man-* appears to stem from the same root as Gothic **ga-man*, ‘member of a group of people’, usually in connection with belonging to a household. In early Scandinavian usage, *man* was used for unfree persons of either sex.²⁹ Later the definition shifted to mean specifically female slaves. Jenny

²⁵ Grg Ib, 84; II, 393.

²⁶ Grg Ib, 47–48; II, 176–77; cf. Magnús Már Lárusson, ‘Lejermål, Island’, *KLNM*, x (1965), cols 478–79.

²⁷ Bjarni Einarsson, *Skáldasögur: Um uppruna og eðli ástaskáldsagnanna fornu* (Reykjavík: Bókaútgáfa menningarssjóðs, 1961); see also Bjarni Einarsson, ‘The Lovesick Skald: A Reply to Theodore M. Andersson’, *Mediaeval Scandinavia*, 4 (1971), 21–41 (p. 34).

²⁸ Jenny M. Jochens, ‘From Libel to Lament: Male Manifestations of Love in Old Norse’, in *From Sagas to Society*, ed. by Gisli Pálsson, pp. 247–64; see also Else Mundal, ‘Æ standa mér augo / of eld til Gráfeldar: Ein mansong til Haraldr gráfeldr?’, in *Festskrift til Alfred Jakobsen*, ed. by Jan Ragnar Hagland and others (Trondheim: Tapir, 1987), pp. 120–29 (p. 128 n. 10).

²⁹ Peter Foote and David M. Wilson, *The Viking Achievement: The Society and Culture of Early Medieval Scandinavia* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1970), p. 75.

Jochens believes that this indicates that *mansǫngr* may originally have been addressed to slave women. This is not unthinkable, as the sources from the early Middle Ages relate that both Norwegian and Frankish kings could become fascinated by women from lower social strata and even make them queens. Circumstantial evidence for this, however, is very shaky. That poems dedicated to such women could create a whole new genre within that of love poetry is not very likely. This, however, does not explain why *mansǫngr* was forbidden in Iceland in the twelfth century.

The context of the legal provisions shows that in Iceland *mansǫngr* was seen as an affront to the woman's father or husband. In the version of laws in *Konungsbók* the provision is connected with other insults in poetic form, such as calling a man *ragr* or *stroðinn*. This was an accusation of being the passive partner in homosexual intercourse, and therefore symbolically deprived of manhood (*níð*).³⁰ In *Staðarhólsbók*, however, the provision is placed in *Vigslóði*, the same chapter where we find the provision allowing a man to kill anyone who sleeps with one of the women of his household. Jochens's conclusion, thus, is that in the early Scandinavian Middle Ages, *mansǫngr* was seen on the same level as *níð* since it cast doubt on a man's ability to defend the women of his household, a key aspect of a free man's masculine identity.³¹

This explanation of the fear of *mansǫngr* seems feasible when we consider Norse ideas of honour. *Níð* was forbidden both in *Grágás* and in Norwegian provincial laws, and it was certainly an old form of defamation. But where did the force of the *níð* lie? The *níð* we encounter in the sagas of Icelanders is intended to emasculate the subject of the verse. Seemingly, such a slander was more powerful if it was expressed in poetic form. *Níð* was therefore very much associated with the skalds, the same people who composed *mansǫngr*.³² At the same time, however, one thing remains unclear: did *mansǫngr* truly contain insults in every case, or was poetry addressed to women dangerous regardless of its content?

³⁰ Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, *The Unmanly Man: Concepts of Sexual Defamation in Northern Society*, The Viking Collection, 1 (Odense: Odense University Press, 1983).

³¹ Jochens, 'From Libel to Lament', p. 252.

³² Meulengracht Sørensen, *Unmanly Man*, p. 30: 'Poetry was held in high regard, and was a better medium than prose, easier to remember and better fitted to be spread abroad and attract attention.' On the possible connotations of 'skáld' to 'scold', see Michail I. Steblin-Kamenskij, 'On the Etymology of the Word Skáld', in *Afmaelsrit Jóns Helgasonar 30 júní 1969*, ed. by Jakob Benediktsson and others (Reykjavík: Heimskringla, 1969), pp. 421–30. *Níð* could also be performed by making wooden figures that alluded to a homosexual act, or through subtle playing with symbols; cf. Alison Finlay, 'Níð, Adultery and Feud in *Bjarnar Saga Hitðælakappa*', *Saga-Book*, 23 (1991), 158–78 (p. 165): 'Neither the laws nor saga texts make it clear to what extent *níð* was of its nature symbolic nor whether insults in verse were more likely to be described as *níð* than those in prose, in spite of the stress laid on these aspects by different studies of *níð* [...]. Nevertheless, the examples [...] demonstrate a tendency of the sagas to associate stories of *níð* with poets, confirming that insults in verse were thought to be particularly forceful and memorable.'

Mansöngr was clearly considered dishonouring to the *giptingarmaðr*. In both *Hallfreðar saga* and *Kormáks saga* we find skaldic verses that praise a woman while simultaneously insulting her *giptingarmaðr* or husband. A good example is a verse Hallfreðr composes about Kolfinna and her husband Gríss:

Leggr at lýsibrekku
 Leggjar íss af Grísi,
 Kvöl þolir hón hjá hönnum,
 Heitr ofremmðar sveiti:
 En dreyþilig drúpir
 Dýnu Rón hjá hönnum,
 Leyfik ljópssa vífa
 Lund, sem qlpt á sundi.³³

There streams from Gríss on to the bright slope of arm's ice [Kolfinna] hot sweat, most rank (Hlín [Kolfinna] suffers anguish beside him); and gloomily the Rán of eiderdown [Kolfinna] droops beside him like a swan swimming. The bright lady's nature I praise.³⁴

Hallfreðr suggests that Gríss is not good enough for Kolfinna, that he literally stinks in bed! That she is not pleased with him means that Hallfreðr can tout himself as a better man than Gríss. We see the same in Kormákr's verses. It is particularly Þorvaldr tinteinn, Steingerðr's second husband, who bears the brunt of this. Kormákr laments that she loves him, but goes to bed with a contemptible man.³⁵ For the skalds, a woman's husband and male kin are obstacles because of their relationship to the woman the skald loves. This poetry indicates that a man's love for a woman was often linked to aggression against other men.

An episode in *Landnámabók* gives what is perhaps the best example of how men combined love for a woman with hatred of her relations. Tjörvi inn háðsami ('the mocker') wants to marry Ástriðr manvitsbrekka, but she is married off to Þórir Ketillson instead. Tjörvi is none too pleased, and put his feelings into words:

þá dró Tjörvi líkneski þeira á kamarsvegg, ok hvert kveld, er þeir Hróarr gengu til kamars, þá hrækði hann í andlit líknesi Þóris, en kysti hennar líknesi, áðr Hróarr skóf af. Eptir þat skar Tjörvi þau á knífsskepti sínu ok kvað þetta:
 Vér höfum þar sem Þóri
 (þat var sett við glettu)
 auðar unga brúði
 áðr á vegg of fáða.

³³ Hall st. 18. Stanzas 19, 20, and 23 have a similar mix of praise for Kolfinna and defamation of Gríss. See also st. 4.

³⁴ Diana Whaley's translation, slightly emended, in 'The Saga of Hallfred Troublesome-Poet', in *Sagas of Warrior-Poets*, ed. by Diana Whaley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2002), p. 97, vol. I.

³⁵ Krm st. 55. Cf. sts 18, 19, 51, 52, 53, 57, 58, 66, 67, and 71. See also Eyr st. 25.

Nú hefi ek rastakarms ristit
 (réð ek einn fyrir því meini
 hauka skopts) á hepti
 Hlín ǵlbækis mínu.

Hér af gerðuz vig þeira Hróars ok systursona hans. (Lnd (S) ch. 284; Lnd (H) ch. 245)

Then Tjorvi drew pictures of them on the latrine wall, and every evening, when he and Hróarr [his mother's brother] went to the latrine, he spat on the face of the picture of Þórir and kissed the picture of her, until Hróarr scraped off the pictures. Then Tjorvi carved them on his knife handle and recited this:

We once drew a drawing on the wall of the rich and young woman along
 with Þórir. That was done in spite. Now, I have carved the good woman
 onto my knife's handle, because well did I know her.

Because of all this Hróarr and his sister's sons were killed.

It has been suggested that this episode was inspired by the romance of Tristan and Isolde. After Tristan marries another woman, he makes an image of his beloved in a grotto where he spends much time meditating on his fate.³⁶ The verse, however, has greater similarities with the other episodes where love and insult are combined. Tjorvi carved the image of Ástriðr 'in spite'. He boasts of having been close to her, but certainly did not dwell on his love for her. Thus, even the verse can be interpreted as a *níð* against Þórir.³⁷ *Landnámabók* is not concerned with whether Tjorvi actually had a relationship with Ástriðr. The function of the story is to explain why Hróarr and his nephews were killed; it was clear enough from this brief story. We can therefore conclude that the connection between verse directed to a woman and *níð* against her *giptingarmaðr* or husband is very close. This all seems to support Jochens's theory.

But the fact that some verses called *mansǫngr* contained *níð* does not mean that all poems composed for women were necessarily intended as insulting. The point is that when most people understood a verse as *níð*, the woman's father, brother, or husband had to act, regardless of whether the poet's 'real' motive was love or insult. In *Hallfreðar saga* we are told that Ingólfr composes a *mansǫngsdrápa* to Valgerðr. A *drápa* is a poem which was usually addressed to kings or other prominent men, but it is used here as a poem praising the woman Ingólfr loves. Because of this poem, Óttarr wanted Ingólfr to be condemned to outlawry. In this case the content counted for little; it was the mere existence of the *drápa* that infuriated Óttarr.

³⁶ Paul Schach, 'Some Observations on the Influence of *Tristrams saga ok Isðandar* in Old Icelandic Literature', in *Old Norse Literature and Mythology: A Symposium*, ed. by Edgar C. Polomé (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969), pp. 81–129 (pp. 98–99).

³⁷ For a thorough treatment of Tjorvi's *níð*, see William Sayers, 'A Scurrilous Episode in *Landnámabók*: Tjorvi the Mocker', *Maal og Minne*, 1993, 127–48 (pp. 137–40). The carving of the knife could possibly be read as *níð*; see *ibid.*, p. 136: 'the wooden knife served as a *níðstǫng* in miniature on which Þórir was depicted as the victim of buggery, symbolized by the penetration of the metal tang of the knife into the shaft, just as the mare was spitted on the pole.'

Clearly it contributed to publicizing the relationship between Valgerðr and Ingólfr. We shall return later to *mansǫngr* that was not intended as insulting but was nevertheless taken as such. For now it will be sufficient to observe that both the laws and the sagas regard the problem of *mansǫngr* as its propensity to bring the relationship between the poet and the woman literally to everyone's lips.

There is yet another aspect of *mansǫngr* that contributed to *giptingarmenn* reacting so strongly to skalds. Skaldic poetry often had a powerful effect on the person to whom it was addressed. *Mansǫngr* was not just a means of mocking the woman's *giptingarmaðr*; it was also connected to magical influences on the woman herself. An event in *Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar* illustrates the effect *mansǫngr* was thought to have on a woman's mind. The episode does not deal with poetry, but with words directed to a woman in the form of carved runes, *manrúnar*. During a visit to a farmer in Sweden, Egill learns that his host's daughter, Helga, is sick. Egill finds runes carved on a whalebone in her bed. He burns the whalebone and carves new runes which make Helga well again. It turns out that a neighbour boy had tried with runes to win the girl's love:

En maðr sá, er Helgu hafði rúnar ristit, var þaðan skammt á brott; kom þatt þá upp, at hann hafði beðit hennar, en Þorfinnr vildi eigi gipta hana; þa vildi bóndason gleypja hana, en hon vildi eigi; þa þóttisk hann rista henni manrúnar, en hann kunni þat eigi, ok hafði hann þat ristit henni, er hon fekk meinsemi af. (Egs ch. 76)

The man that had carved runes for Helga lived nearby. It came up that he had asked for her, but Þorfinnr did not want to marry her to him. Then the farmer's son wanted to seduce her, but she did not want that. Then he thought of carving *manrúnar* to her, but he did not master it, and she became ill by what he had carved.

The saga confirms that words were a powerful means of turning a woman's thoughts. The farmer's son merely did not have the same degree of control as Egill over the magical power of runes.³⁸ The prefix *man-* is connected to magical control over women in many other instances as well. We have already seen that the word was originally used in reference to low-status women. But in Eddic poetry *man* is already

³⁸ See Laurence de Looze, 'Poet, Poem and Poetic Process in *Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar*', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 104 (1989), 123–42 (p. 136): 'the linguistic conversion effected by Egill becomes a conversion of sickness to health, the text renewing and extending life.' In Norwegian folklore, to seduce a woman by magic was called 'to rune'; see Ørnulf Hodne, *Kjærlighetsmagi: Folketro om forelskelse, erotikk og ekteskap* (Oslo: Cappelen, 1994), p. 26. On erotic magic in medieval Iceland and Norway, see also Else Mundal and Gro Steinsland, 'Kvinner og medisinsk magi', in *Kvinnors rosenård: Medeltidskvinnors liv och hälsa, lust och barnafödande*, ed. by Hedda Gunneng and others, Skriftserie från Centrum för kvinnoforskning vid Stockholms Universitet, 1 (Stockholm: Stockholms Universitet, 1989), pp. 97–121; William Sayers, 'Sexual Identity, Cultural Integrity, Verbal and Other Magic in Episodes from *Laxdæla saga* and *Kormáks saga*', *Arkiv för Nordisk Filologi*, 107 (1992), 131–55; Stephen A. Mitchell, 'Anaphrodisiac Charms in the Nordic Middle Ages: Impotence, Infertility, and Magic', *Norveg*, 41.1 (1998), 19–42.

being used for free men's daughters or free women.³⁹ In particular, the women in Jötunheimr who are seduced by Óðinn, usually in connection with magic or coercion, are called *man*. In *Hárbarðsljóð* it is said that Óðinn uses *manvélar* ('women's arts') to attract women from Jötunheimr to himself. By the use of such arts Óðinn wins the love of a giant-woman and makes her 'his' woman (*man*), in the sense of 'member of a household'. In *Skírnismál* Gerðr is designated a *man* when she is threatened with losing her desire for men (34). Her will is made subject to Skírnir, and thus she can indirectly be interpreted as being dependent on him. The twelfth-century understanding of *mansøngr* seems to have still been associated with ideas of the Æsir's power over women's wills. After all, Óðinn was the god of the skalds, and as we have seen, he recommended fine words, gifts, and sorcery to win a woman's love. The mythological poems show that this contributed to the Æsir gaining a firm upper hand over the giants. Since *mansøngr* had power to turn a woman's love toward the poet, the woman's father or husband was symbolically placed in a subordinate position in relation to the skald.⁴⁰

Ideas about the aphrodisiac effect of word-magic also extended to the form of poems and enhanced the threat of seduction defeating the control of the *giptingarmaðr* over a woman's will. The most common word for seduction of women, *fifla*, has a wider meaning of turning another's mind towards one. This use of the word can be applied to other areas where women turned their loyalty to other men than their *giptingarmaðr* or husband.⁴¹ In the saga about the apostle Thomas, some prominent men ask him, 'Who, then, is this God of yours, who lures our women away from us by your words?'⁴² Even though this text refers to religious conversion, the use of *fifla* here indicates that the term was associated with a man's desire for power over a woman's will.

Likewise, seduction in the sagas of Icelanders is not always connected to a description of a couple's sexual escapades. It is the *conversations* between the man and woman to which the sagas call attention. A few historians, such as Jenny Jochens, have suggested that the writers, presumably clerics, drew a veil over their forefathers' aggressive sexuality for the sake of morality, referring to 'conversation' when they

³⁹ Anne Holtsmark, 'Kjærlighetsmagi', *KLNM*, VIII (1963), cols 444–47 (col. 446), and Mundal and Steinsland, 'Kvinner og medisinsk magi', pp. 113–14, point to the close affinity between *mansøngr* and *manvélar*.

⁴⁰ This is similar to the conception of love magic in Greek-Roman Antiquity; see Fritz Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); Christopher A. Faone, *Ancient Greek Love Magic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

⁴¹ See e.g. *Lnd* (S) ch. 180; *Vatn* chs 18–19; *Eyr* chs 40, 47; *Vgs* chs 21–22; *Gis* ch. 2. An intriguing episode is found in *Reykð* ch. 30 where the word *fifla* is used for the art of making a woman in another household agree to kill her foster-father. Her foster-father disregards the visiting seducer, a mistake that leads to his death. The woman admittedly gets angry after the killing, but she is said to love her seducer and marries him.

⁴² PS, p. 724: 'Hverr er sa guð þinn, er fíflir fra oss konur varar fyrir orð þin?'

meant 'sex'. Nevertheless, the saga writers were not too bashful to include sex scenes in the sagas. Sex was more often thought of as a part of 'talking together'. An episode in *Droplaugarsonar saga* gives an example of how 'talking with' also included intercourse. One of the characters, Björn, often 'spoke with Þórdís, wife of Þorsteinn'.⁴³ These 'conversations' resulted some time later in the birth of a child.⁴⁴ Separating sexuality and conversation was not as easy for Icelanders in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries as it was later to become.

Giptingarmenn and husbands feared *mansöngur* because the woman's loyalty could be turned away from the household. Such poetry acquired a social significance in that it symbolized a woman's subjugation to another household, attacking the masculine attribute of controlling the loyalty of the women in his own household. By extension, therefore, the poetry itself challenged a man's honour. He had to fight back. Thus it is probable that the ban on *mansöngur* had its roots in ancient times, as Jochens believes, even if it was hardly ever aimed particularly at slave-women. Instead, such poetry transformed other men's womenfolk into the skald's *man*: her loyalty was transferred to the skald's household.

Love and Politics

The sagas of Icelanders describe Viking Age society as relatively egalitarian, which meant that it took little to tip the balance of status between two households. By around 1200, the social differences between chieftains and farmers had become sharper. Does that mean that seduction had fewer social consequences in the contemporary sagas? There can be little doubt that men could become enemies over the seduction of a woman in the twelfth century. The logic behind the conflicts is strikingly often the same in the contemporary sagas as we have seen in the sagas of Icelanders.

A good example of this from the early twelfth century is the priest Ketill Þorsteinsson's reaction when he becomes suspicious that Guðmundr Grímsson has seduced his wife. According to *Þorgils saga ok Haflíða* he feels wounded by the gossip about his wife and Guðmundr, but finds out that it is only a rumour. Even though the rumour is untrue, he attacks Guðmundr out of fear for his own honour.⁴⁵

Men used women in their enemies' households to display their power. For an example of this we return to *Þorgils saga ok Haflíða*. A rich man, Hneitir, owns some fishing boats in north-western Iceland. The uncongenial Már Bergþórsson manages Hneitir's fleet. After several conflicts between Már and the crew, Hneitir wants to dismiss him. But the saga notes that there is also another motive behind Hneitir's

⁴³ Drls ch. 6: 'Björn fór jafnan á Desjamýri til tals við Þórdísi, konu Þorsteins'.

⁴⁴ Other 'conversations' ending up in pregnancies are found in Eyr chs 29, 40; Ljós ch. 12 (22); BjHs ch. 32.

⁴⁵ Sts, I, 47–48; Ljós ch. 21 (31).

clash with Már: ‘the reason was in reality that Hneitir thought Már spoke too much with his daughter. Már answered that he did not care about what smallholders at Strandir thought about his stay, and that he would not take any account of it.’⁴⁶ Már’s answer is an echo of Ingólfr’s proud attitude in *Hallfreðar saga*. For Hneitir, this is a challenge to both his honour and his position as an autonomous head of household. Later he has Már sent away. However, Már returns to prove that no one can tell him what he can and cannot do. To definitively prove his power over Hneitir, Már goes to bed with Hneitir’s daughter, while his servant sleeps with Hneitir’s wife. In this instance, the seduction itself is not the central event; it is the proof of power through control over women.⁴⁷

A third episode which may strike the modern reader as odd takes place in Reykjadalr in 1195. *Íslendinga saga* relates that Guðmundr Steinsson follows Þórdís, daughter of Þorgils Skeggjason, home from Mass: ‘Þorgils ran after them, but when he came near, Guðmundr put his axe behind his back without turning round. It struck Þorgils in the eye so that he became blind in one eye.’⁴⁸ The saga’s economical description of Þorgils’s and Guðmundr’s dealings is difficult to explain unless considered in the context in which it was written. The saga’s audience is assumed to understand why Þorgils reacts as he does. This understanding on the part of the audience of the contemporary sagas was gained from the sagas of Icelanders, where the dynamic in such conflicts is much more thoroughly described. In that light, Guðmundr’s conversation with Þorgils’s daughter is a good enough reason for him to run after the pair. The saga is not concerned with Guðmundr’s intentions with the conversation, nor whether Þórdís cares for him. On these two points the episode resembles the typical way of describing a romantic visit in the sagas of Icelanders as well. For the writer of the contemporary saga, it was enough to touch on the audience’s knowledge of how fathers had a problem with this type of conversation.

What characterizes romantic encounters in the contemporary sagas is that they are only included in connection with the struggle for power between chieftains. The conflict between Þorgils and Guðmundr also has a very political side. Þorgils is the kinsman of Hámundr Gilsson, a highly respected farmer in Reykjadalr. Guðmundr is friends with Þórðr rauðr, Hámundr’s rival regarding the rights to resources in the district. Guðmundr and Þorgils are thus on opposite sides of an already tense conflict in the area. Then the focus shifts from the story to a forbidden tryst and to the chieftain’s relationship to his men. In the twelfth century chieftains still depended on

⁴⁶ Sts, I, 16: ‘En þat var raunar, at Hneiti þótti Már gera of margtalat við dóttur sína. Már kvaðst eigi hirða, hvat þeir búkarlar ræddi þar á Ströndum um vistir hans, ok lézt þar mundu engan gaum at gefa.’

⁴⁷ A similar episode is found in *Guðmundar saga dýra*, where Guðmundr almost has a concubine raped because the man she is living with is his enemy (Sts, I, 201–02).

⁴⁸ Sts, I, 233: ‘Þorgils hljóp eftir þeim. En er hann bar at, stakk Guðmundr oxinni á bak sér, svá at hann leit eigi til, ok kom í auga Þorgils, ok varð hann einsýnn.’ There are many such episodes in *Sturlunga saga*, see Sts, I, 68, 72–73, 79, 80, 82, 102, 167, 174–75, 177–79, 204, 218.

having loyal thing-men among the farmers to legitimize their power, and in return they had to give their thing-men support in the conflicts in which they found themselves. Conflicts between thing-men loyal to different chieftains often led to power struggles between the chieftains themselves. The first three sagas in the composite *Sturlunga saga* (*Þorgils saga ok Hafliða*, *Hvamm-Sturlu saga*, and *Guðmundar saga dýra*) all centre on conflicts between two chieftains. All the lesser conflicts between their subordinate thing-men are part of the ongoing struggle for power between the two chieftains. In the twelfth century, seduction could function as a link in a political strategy of a chieftain in his struggle for power, or perhaps to a greater degree as thing-men's strategic exploitation of their connections to chieftains to bolster their own position in their local area.

Már's dealings with Hneitir must therefore be interpreted in the light of this political situation. Már is related to the chieftain Hafliði and consciously uses this fact to show that he is above Hneitir. Hneitir is a kinsman of Hafliði's rival Þorgils, and in the build-up of the main conflict in *Þorgils saga ok Hafliða*, the wrangling between Már and Hneitir becomes the provocation that leads to political imbalance throughout Iceland. In this saga, the conflict between the two rival chieftains ends in a settlement. The conclusive reason the settlement succeeds is actually Ketill Þorsteinsson, whom we have already encountered as the vengeful priest.⁴⁹ According to the saga, he tells the story of his misfortunes to the chieftain Hafliði in order to make Hafliði understand that even the toughest conflicts about honour can be resolved in unexpected ways.

In Ketill's fight with Guðmundr Grímsson, his rumoured rival, he loses his sight in one eye. Ketill relates that he wanted to bring a suit at the Althing, but influential men supported Guðmundr. For this reason the suit failed, and Ketill lost even more honour in the matter. A monetary compensation was offered, but marked by his family's 'violence and pride' (as he himself calls it), he refused to relent until Guðmundr was declared an outlaw. But then, Ketill says, he came to a different solution: he waived the whole matter with Guðmundr and even invited him to his home for a long stay. Then the gossip and public opinion changed, Ketill tells Hafliði, and everything turned around and became happiness and honour for him. Ketill says himself that he did it for God, and Hafliði is so impressed that he immediately

⁴⁹ This reading is inspired by Stephen Tranter's study on the first part of the *Sturlunga* compilation: Stephen Norman Tranter, *Sturlunga Saga: The Role of the Creative Compiler*, European University Studies, Series I, German Language and Literature, 941 (Frankfurt a.M.: Lang, 1987); cf. also Úlfar Bragason, 'Sturlunga: A Political Statement', in *The Audience of the Sagas: Preprints*, vol. II, The Eighth International Saga Conference (Gothenburg: Gothenburg University, 1991), pp. 315–22. A similar commentary by an Icelandic clerk on the seduction of other men's wives is found in the *First Grammatical Treatise*, written c. 1150: 'Those men are very brazen who are not ashamed to take my wife from me [. . .]. A good man should not get into this habit, even though an evil man is confident of (being able to obtain the favors of) good women' (FGT, p. 221).

proposes Ketill as the new bishop of Hólar. Hafliði follows Ketill's example, and not long after he comes to a reconciliation with his rival Þorgils. *Þorgils saga ok Hafliða*, thus, sees a connection between men's desire for women and their quest for honour as a conduit through which the forces of chaos are released into society, but the saga writer says that Ketill's departure from a vengeance rationale was a key to solving his problems.

In the subsequent sagas of the compilation, the problems caused by romantic conflicts became still more difficult for society to solve. *Hvamm-Sturlu saga*, which is set in the period after *Þorgils saga ok Hafliða* (1148–83), is characterized by the conflicts generated between the *goðar* Sturla Þórðarson (d. 1183) and Einarr Þorgilsson because their thing-men are fighting over women. Sturla's first case at the Althing stems from the suit Þorsteinn Ásbjarnarson and his son Eiríkr bring against Gils Þormóðarson for getting Ásný knarrarbringa pregnant. Gils is Sturla's kinsman, so Sturla takes the case. Sturla offers Þorsteinn and Eiríkr compensation, but they decline. The case comes before the court, but is not resolved. The case is finally settled as Sturla wants it to be, with compensation and without a sentence of outlawry for Gils. Here, the *goði* functions as an arbitrator as he should, and Sturla's honour grows considerably afterward. The case shows implicitly that such a peaceful solution was seen as extremely difficult to accomplish. Only a clever and powerful man could solve a conflict where so much honour was at stake for such prominent men.

The next case Sturla became involved with was much more problematic. Yngvildr Þorgilsdóttir, the sister of the chieftain Einarr Þorgilsson, had been widowed and now lived with Þoðvarr Barkarson. Yngvildr becomes pregnant, but no one knows who the father is. People begin to suspect Þorvarðr Þorgeirsson, Sturla's wife's brother. Þorvarðr acquits himself by the ordeal of hot iron (carried out by another on his behalf). But then Yngvildr secretly elopes to Norway with Þorvarðr, and the suspicions of most are revived. Einarr accuses Sturla of having helped them on their journey. This case also goes through the courts, but both Einarr and Sturla are sentenced to the lesser outlawry for their mutual accusations.⁵⁰ Yngvildr and Þorvarðr's affair had become power politics.

The conflict between the two chieftains, Einarr and Sturla, is deepened still further by two new romantic relationships. Einarr Ingibjargarson, Sturla's stepson, had been for a visit to Arngerðr, who is described in the saga as a beautiful woman, but who is already living with Sigurðr kællingenese. While Einarr goes into the house to Arngerðr, Sigurðr chases Einarr's horse away. This is certainly taken as a deep insult, because only itinerant people and slaves walked in Iceland. In retribution, Einarr beats Sigurðr up; the women have to hold Einarr back to prevent him from killing him. An important aspect of the story is that Sigurðr is Einarr Þorgilsson's thing-man. Sigurðr quickly tells him of the insult he has received.⁵¹ It is only through

⁵⁰ Sts, I, 72–73.

⁵¹ Sts, I, 79.

the active mobilization of Sturla's men that Einarr Þorgilsson's quest for vengeance against Einarr Ingibjargarson is stopped.

The other episode is when Álfr Þrúnlúfsson brings a suit against Kjartan Þorvaldsson. Kjartan has wounded Álfr's son Bárðr because a rumour was going around that Bárðr seduced (*fíflði*) Helga, who is married to Kjartan's kinsman Klement. Álfr asks Einarr Þorgilsson for help, but Einarr believes he is closer to Kjartan. Therefore, Álfr goes to Sturla. Sturla succeeds in making a settlement, which doubtless makes Einarr furious. As a result of this, Álfr becomes Sturla's thing-man.⁵²

These are not the only romantic relationships that lead to conflict in *Hvamm-Sturlu saga*. It is characteristic of this saga that these conflicts always seem to reach the level of power politics: a number of chieftains are responsible for affecting a resolution. The farmers increasingly look to chieftains to defend their honour for them. The chieftains represent their thing-men's honour to such a degree that all their thing-men's love-related conflicts become problematic for them.

The main part of *Sturlunga saga*, Sturla Þórðarson's *Íslendinga saga* from the beginning of the 1280s, gives a similar perspective on the consequences of seduction in the volatile society of Iceland. We have seen how Þorgils runs after Guðmundr Steinsson when he walks Þorgils's daughter home from Mass in 1195. This event may have really taken place, but we should be aware that Sturla Þórðarson would not have included this tragedy in his saga if he had not regarded it as politically significant. The conversation between Guðmundr and Þórdís is portrayed in *Íslendinga saga* as the spark that ignited a series of other conflicts. Society had no means to halt the 'avalanche' of events. According to *Íslendinga saga*, the conflict spreads when Þorgils's kinsman Hámundr gets involved, while Guðmundr gets help from his friend Þórðr rauðr, an old enemy of Hámundr's. After this, large parts of the district become involved. The conflict is made even more serious when Hámundr and Þórðr go to their *goðar*, Þórðr Sturluson and Kolbeinn Túmason respectively. Despite intervention by the powerful Bishop Páll Jónsson, the situation in Iceland remains very tense. What started as an apparently private feud about honour ends up rocking the nation's balance of power. As Sturla portrays the episode, it appears as if he regards Guðmundr's dispute with Þorgils as having been blown tragically out of proportion with regard to the innocent character the conversation 'really' had.⁵³

For the *goðar*, the thing-men's conflicts must only have been a means of proving another chieftain's power, or a 'hot potato' to be passed off to someone else. As the power of the *goðar* increased, the ability of the chieftains to achieve durable

⁵² Sts, I, 102.

⁵³ On Sturla's attitude on violence, see Guðrún Nordal, *Ethics and Action*, p. 30; Johan Anton Rønneberg Rygg, 'Fra spontanitet og voldsglede til selvkontroll og avsky for vold? En mentalitetshistorisk studie i voldsforståelse på det førstetlige Island og i det statlige Norge, ca. 1180–1300' (unpublished master's thesis, University of Oslo, 1997), pp. 51–104. On the changing view of love during the thirteenth century, see below, chapter 8.

solutions through arbitration must also have grown.⁵⁴ Before 1230, however, it does not appear that the *goðar* succeeded in stopping the violence between farmers stemming from romantic relationships; on the one hand chieftains could use such conflicts to prove their power at the Althing, but conflicts could also threaten the entire balance of society without chieftains being able to stop the process.

On the other hand, a few chieftains gradually became so powerful that their *own* love affairs did not threaten any balance. It was advantageous enough for the male relatives of 'common' women to remain in good standing with powerful men in that period, even as an egalitarian ideology continued to live in the sagas and the concept of honour. A relatively common idea we find in the kings' sagas from the decades around 1200 is that chieftains and kings in earlier times had many women. A rather typical episode is found in *Jómsvíkinga saga*, where we are told the story of the shrewd Æsa. A serving-woman in the household of the chieftain Pálnatóki, she is assigned to wait on King Haraldr Gormsson when he comes to visit. Nine months later she gives birth to a boy she names Sveinn, who later becomes King of Denmark. In one version Æsa's own father urges her to sleep with the King so she will become the mother of a king.⁵⁵ An alliance with the powerful Haraldr was more important for the girl's father than self-vindicating honour. In another famous episode King Sigurðr munnr (d. 1155) stops outside a chieftain's farm because he hears a servant girl's lovely singing. He sleeps with the beautiful girl without asking her head of household, and she later gives birth to the boy Hákon. The chieftain sees that the child is well taken care of because of this fosterling's potential to secure the kingship. The chieftain's gamble pays off; the serving-girl's little boy later becomes King Hákon herðibreiðr (d. 1162).

Kings were viewed by the Icelanders as being so powerful that they were far removed from ordinary regard for women's fathers or guardians. The accepted relationship between kings and women of lower social rank is partly dependent on the women's own low status, and partly an acceptance that the king was exalted above other men. Their sexual relationships, therefore, did not disturb the balance of the society the kings' sagas describe.

The Icelandic kings' sagas nevertheless tell their audience that chieftains' sexual dalliances are not always accepted, especially if a man believed he was more powerful than he really was. An episode in *Haralds saga gráfeldar* illustrates how a relationship could be interpreted negatively. King Sigurðr slefa visits the home of Klyppr hersi while Klyppr is away. While there, he rapes Klyppr's wife. Klyppr gathers some men and kills King Sigurðr for this. That Klyppr himself is then immediately killed by the king's men should not hinder us from seeing the story as a legitimization of Klyppr's right to avenge Sigurðr's act. Klyppr is a chieftain, almost equal to the king. Moreover, it is his wife the king takes, not a servant girl as in the

⁵⁴ Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, *Chieftains and Power*. It was Sturla Þórðsson and Jón Loptsson who were most successful in arbitrating such cases before the end of the Commonwealth.

⁵⁵ Jvs, pp. 32–34; cf. Jenny M. Jochens, 'The Politics of Reproduction: Medieval Norwegian Kingship', *American Historical Review*, 92 (1987), 327–49 (p. 335).

case of Haraldr Gormsson or Sigurðr munnr. King Sigurðr slefa's act of rape is therefore a demonstration that the chieftain should not overestimate himself in relation to other prominent men in society.⁵⁶

The relationships of Earl Hákon (d. 995) with other men's women are evaluated in a similar light. Snorri Sturluson writes that in his later years, Hákon took women from the farmers in Þrænðalög. He kept them with him for a few weeks before sending them home again:

Jarl var vinsæll við búendr lengsta hríð ævi sinnar. En er á leið, þá gerðisk þat mjök at um jarl, at hann var ósiðugr um kvennafar. Gerðisk þar svá mikit at, at jarl lét taka ríkra manna dætr ok flytja heim til sín ok lá hjá viku eða tvær, sendi heim síðan, ok fekk hann af því óþokka mikinn af frændum kvinnanna, ok tóku bændr at kurra illa. (Hkr:ÓsT ch. 45)

The earl [Hákon] was popular among the farmers most of the time he lived, but eventually it went so far with the earl that he was unseemly in affairs concerning women. It came about that the earl let daughters of rich men move home to him and lay with them for a week or two, and then sent them home again. This brought him great enmity among the relatives of the women, and the farmers began to grumble.

In other words, Earl Hákon made so many enemies through his dealings with women that Snorri regarded this as the reason for his downfall. This does not mean that Snorri disapproved of Hákon's actions from a Christian standpoint, but that such actions were politically unwise.⁵⁷ A chieftain must therefore show moderation with regard to the social status of women and their households in relation to one's own to avoid threatening the balance of power.

Most Icelandic chieftains in the period 1150–1230 themselves had relationships with many women both before and outside of marriage. The two first chieftains we encounter in *Sturlunga saga*, Hafliði Másson and Þorgils Oddason, who were both active around 1120, were the exceptions in this respect. Whether or not these men really were monogamous, it is striking that *Þorgils saga ok Hafliða*, written at the beginning of the thirteenth century, does not accentuate affairs with women as a significant characteristic of these two chieftains.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ There is a similar story in *Hálfðanar saga svarta* ch. 5. The berserk Haki kills a petty king and elopes with his daughter. King Hálfðan svartir rescues her and kills Haki.

⁵⁷ See Sverre Bagge, 'Mann og kvinne i *Heimskringla*', in *Fokus på kvinner i middelalderkilder*, ed. by Berit J. Sellevold, Else Mundal, and Gro Steinsland (Skara: Viktoria, 1992), pp. 8–31 (p. 12). The Latin historians of twelfth-century Norway perceived the cause of the rebellion against Earl Hákon somewhat differently. They emphasized the successful mission of Óláfr Tryggvason and God's intervention, HN ch. 17; TM ch. 10; cf. Svend Ellehøj, *Studier over den ældste norrøne historieskrivning*, Bibliotheca Arnamagnæana, 26 (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1965), pp. 212–13.

⁵⁸ This may have been a part of an idealized picture at the time of writing, or perhaps by the compiler himself, who saw the story of the Icelandic Commonwealth in the perspective of

The next strong chieftains presented in *Sturlunga saga* are Sturla Þórðarson and Einarr Þorgilsson. Both of these men had illegitimate children.⁵⁹ Their relationships with the mothers of these children are not described in any further detail, so we cannot say whether the relationships constituted a challenge to other men or not. A contemporary magnate, Þórbjörn Vermundarson, is said to have been a ladies' man and fathered many children in his area.⁶⁰

Towards the close of the twelfth century, stories grow of chieftains who had a mixed relationship to women. The *goði* Guðmundr dýri is blamed for loving many women other than his wife.⁶¹ He takes Þorgerðr Ásbjarnardóttir because he finds her so beautiful. We are told nothing about the reaction of her kin. Her father and brothers may have seen it as profitable to form an alliance with Guðmundr through Þorgerðr. The saga does say that Guðmundr had become so powerful that other chieftains were becoming concerned.⁶² He may thus be an example of the growing power and greater opportunities for chieftains to indulge their lusts without having to face a challenge from anyone. Around 1200 many other chieftains were having children with different women outside of wedlock; Jón Loptsson, Snorri Sturluson, and Sæmundr Jónsson were known for their extramarital relationships with women.⁶³

In *Oddaverjabáttr* we find another example of this practice. We are told that Snælaug Hognadóttir had a child outside of marriage in the 1180s. First she says the father is a hired hand on her father's farm, but Hogni does not think less of her for this. Hogni's mild reaction is surprising; although Hogni is a man of low status, he is rich and an ordained priest. The explanation of Hogni's calm behaviour is, however, interpreted as a planned game on his part. It transpires that the son of a *goði*, Hreinn Hermundarson, was really the baby's father. Hogni is a man without a great deal of honour on his side; he undoubtedly needs a *goði*'s son as his friend.⁶⁴ This may contribute to Snælaug's relationship with Hreinn being accepted by Hogni.

moral decline; cf. Tranter, *Sturlunga saga*. Hafliði was married twice, but any affairs or children outside marriage are not mentioned (Sts, I, 12; cf. 31. ættskrá). Þorgils Oddason was married once, and according to *Hvamm-Sturlu saga* all his children were born within this marriage (Sts, I, 63, 13; cf. 22. ættskrá).

⁵⁹ Sts, I, 55, 76.

⁶⁰ Sts, I, 68–69.

⁶¹ Sts, I, 175–76: 'Sá skaplōstr sótti Guðmund, at hann elskaði konur fleiri en þá, er hann átti.'

⁶² Sts, I, 170: 'Nú þótti hofðingjum ærinn uppgangr Guðmundar dýra.'

⁶³ Jenny M. Jochens, 'The Church and Sexuality in Medieval Iceland', *Journal of Medieval History*, 6 (1980), 377–92; Jochens, 'Snorris Kvinder', in *Samtidarsögur: The Contemporary Sagas*, The Ninth International Saga Conference (Akureyri: Akureyri University, 1994), pp. 380–94.

⁶⁴ PsB (B) ch. 23.

Some chieftains nevertheless go too far. In the 1180s Páll Þórðarson carries off Hallgerðr Rúnólfsdóttir.⁶⁵ She is already married and most people disapprove of the situation. The chieftain Jón Loptsson manages to negotiate a solution, and Hallgerðr goes back to her husband. That most people disapprove of the course of events is primarily due to a general disapproval of the shame brought on the husband, a popular man with powerful friends.

These examples nevertheless indicate that chieftains were considered superior to other actors in their control over women. For many, it could be advantageous for a chieftain to have an affair with a woman in one's household; reciprocally, the chieftain would secure support from her family. From the mid-1200s, mistresses and looser connections with women in other households became a less significant component for chieftains in building their political power. An episode in *Þorgils saga skarða* illustrates how the divide between chieftains and peasants had grown, and how this was expressed in seductions of peasant women. The powerful Þorgils skarði (d. 1258) meets the beautiful Jóreiðr, who is married to the farmer Vestarr Torfason.⁶⁶ Vestarr grabs a sword and charges him. Þorgils, however, is not at all threatened; he has a number of attendants who take the sword from the farmer and are about to beat him up. Þorgils defends the poor farmer; he has at least displayed boldness. He assures Vestarr that he had not wanted to do anything to his wife and gives him an axe as a reward for his courage. The story portrays a chieftain who is above a peasant's wrath; the difference between them is too great. Nor does Þorgils have any need to prove his superiority by having his way with the woman. With his men around him he is so powerful that he can appreciate and encourage the heroic, but almost archaic, courage shown by Vestarr.

Vestarr's action stems from ancient heroic ideals, where no tactical consideration blunted the unrestrained desire to avenge oneself. His actual ability to avenge himself on Þorgils was minimal. Þorgils's attendants had become more important than the traditional ideal of self-vindication; social dominance was no longer closely linked to sexual dominance. At the same time, Þorgils represents the arrival of courtly ideals in Iceland. This is a matter we will return to later.

The Role of Women in Seduction Stories

Stories of seductions tend to concentrate to a great degree on relations between men. This has been interpreted to mean that the woman's view had no significance and that the forbidden visits of lovers should be seen as an expression of a general sexual aggression directed against women.⁶⁷ On the other hand, the absence of a woman's

⁶⁵ Sts, I, 103.

⁶⁶ Sts, II, 152–53: 'Þorgils tók í hönd henni ok glensaði við hana.'

⁶⁷ Jochens, 'Illicit Love Visit'.

voice has been interpreted to mean that the women were not responsible for the visits; they were not guilty of lack of judgement in allowing the visits because it was the duty of the *giptingarmaðr* or husband to safeguard women against seducers. Either way, their opinions did not count for much.

The *giptingarmaðr*'s fear of the power of seduction over women's minds, together with women's role as bestowers of honour, nevertheless indicate that women's opinions *did* have significance. The question is how their opinions mattered: whether a woman's honour was autonomous in relation to her father or husband, or whether she had no personal honour to defend at all, but could only partake of the household's honour. Here opinions diverge. Preben Meulengracht Sørensen believed that women primarily obtained honour through their households and husbands. Women and men had complementary roles in the honour dynamic; men's active role in society meant that they either won or lost honour, while women's passive role in public life meant that they had to ensure that their husbands and sons did not lose the honour they had won, for example by whetting them to action when required.⁶⁸ In such cases, women's opinions and actions in the sagas have a significance for how the whole household and the men are judged, and less as a reflection of what the women actually thought.⁶⁹

This view of women's lack of independent honour has met with opposition. First, women were active in politics in Iceland during the Free State period. This has been pointed to as an indication that there was no sharp distinction between public and private spheres, and that women's actions would thus also have been visible and subject to evaluation by the general public.⁷⁰ Secondly, women could be evaluated according to a separate gender-defined set of norms: actions that were honourable or shameful for women were not necessarily honourable or shameful for men.⁷¹ There is little to indicate that women's honour in such cases was closely linked to their sexuality.⁷²

⁶⁸ Meulengracht Sørensen, *Fortælling*, pp. 226–48.

⁶⁹ Kate Cooper, *The Virgin and the Bride: Idealizing Womanhood in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

⁷⁰ Sólborg Una Pálsdóttir, 'Hlutu konur enga virðingu?', in *Sæmdarmenn: Um heiður á þjóðveldisöld*, ed. by Helgi Þorláksson (Reykjavík: Hugvísindastofnun, Háskóla Íslands, 2001), pp. 41–55; Torill Marlene Sandberg, 'Kvinnens æresidentitet i tre islandske sagaer', *Middelalderforum*, n.s., 2.2 (2002), 18–25.

⁷¹ Else Mundal, 'Den doble verknaden av kristninga for kvinnene i den norrøne kulturen', *Kvinneforskning*, 23 (1999), 65–78 (p. 75).

⁷² Jack Goody has argued that one of the fundamental differences between Northern Europe and the Mediterranean cultures was that virginity of the bride was not as important as property and dowry in the North; see Jack Goody, *The Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 212–13; cf. Agnes S. Arnórsdóttir, *Konur og vígamenn*.

There are a few romantic visits in which women were apparently shamed by receiving a male visitor. According to her father, Steingerðr in *Kormáks saga* is just as insulted as he is by Kormákr's visit.⁷³ Friðgerðr Ísólfsdóttir in *Ljósvetninga saga* is also visited by a man. Her father wants her to go to another farm because the visits serve to increase their shame.⁷⁴ In *Vatnsdæla saga*, which is believed to date from the latter half of the thirteenth century, Óttarr says that both Ingólfr and Valgerðr are living together in disgrace, and Ingólfr's father says that he must stop shaming Óttarr and dishonouring his daughter.⁷⁵ This is an interesting contrast to *Hallfreðar saga* from the beginning of the thirteenth century, where it is primarily the *father's* loss of honour which is at stake.⁷⁶ This may indicate that women's reticence in relations with men received greater emphasis in the course of the thirteenth century. As we shall see, this connection became more common in the literature of the fourteenth century.

Despite the multitude of stories about unwanted suitors in the early Icelandic sagas, there are few signs that women suffered from a lack of regard because of the situation. It is first and foremost the *giptingarmenn* who believe their daughters are being shamed, while there is little to indicate that the saga audience would have unambiguously seen the situation thus. The portrayal of contemporary attitudes to relationships outside of marriage in the sagas of Icelanders shows that women continued to be highly regarded in society. Kolfinna in *Hallfreðar saga* is a good match for Griss. Steingerðr in *Kormáks saga* is married off more than once after her meetings with Kormákr. Valgerðr in *Hallfreðar saga* is seen as an attractive woman even after Ingólfr's visit. We must therefore be open to the possibility that women's actions could be judged by a different set of norms than their fathers', a set of norms which to a certain degree could be accepted by the general public.⁷⁷

⁷³ Krm ch. 4: 'Þorkell spyr nú brátt, hvat um er at vera, ok þykkir sér horfa til óvirðingar ok dóttur sinni, ef Kormákr vill þetta eigi meir festa.'

⁷⁴ Ljós ch. 12 (22): 'Eigi er mér um vistir þinar hér lengr, til þess at í því aukisk vár ósæmð.'

⁷⁵ Vatn ch. 37: 'Þorsteinn mælti til Ingólfs: "Hví verðr þér þat fyrir, at gera Óttari sneypu eða svivirða dóttur hans."'

⁷⁶ Hall ch. 3: 'Síðan hitti Óttarr Þorstein ok bað hann halda svá son sinn, at hann fengi enga ósæmð af honum.'

⁷⁷ In a study of honour and gender, the anthropologist Unni Wikan found several differences in the attitude to honour and shame in the Middle East. While the honour of men was connected to their women's sexual purity, women's honour was more connected to domestic skills, such as being a good hostess. She mentions several cases when a married woman could have an affair outside marriage without being expelled by the community; her hospitality and generosity to neighbours compensated it. As long as the husband did not know about the affair, no one would tell him or blame him. It was simply not their responsibility. But as soon he found out, he was obliged to put a stop to the affair; see Unni Wikan, 'Shame and Honour: A Contestable Pair', *Man*, 19 (1984), 635–52. For a discussion of women's potential social networks in early medieval Ireland, see Lisa M. Bitel, *Land of Women: Tales of Sex and Gender from Early Ireland* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), pp. 138–66.

We encounter the same attitudes in the contemporary sagas. Snælaug Hognadóttir, who had borne a child to a workman, was married off not long afterward to the priest Þórðr Þoðvarsson, because he liked her. The paternity of Yngvildr Þorgilsdóttir's child was not known, but there is nothing to indicate that she was looked down upon for that reason; it was the child's father her relatives wanted to get their hands on. Hallgerðr Rúnólfsdóttir is not degraded as a result of being stolen away by Páll Þórðarson, either — to the contrary. When Jón Loptsson gets involved in the case, he must *persuade* her to go back to her husband. To Hallgerðr, who attended the Althing herself during negotiations, he said:

En þótt þér þykki mannamunr, þá er þó miklu meiri munr um ábyrgð þá, er á er. Ok mun þetta ráð illa út seljast, ok samir þér betr, at þú ráðir þik frá sjálfviljandi, en nauðskilnaðr verði, því at eigi mun þér lengi nytja af auðit. En ekki mun ek at sinni þröngva þér um þetta, en segi ek þér, hvat á mun liggja. En ef þú virðir orð mín ok ferr heim með bónda þínum at þínum vilja, þá skal þat fram ganga. En því mun ek þér heita, ef þú þarft nokkuru sinni mína ásjá, at ek skal þér heill til liðveizlu, ef þú gerir nú eftir mínum vilja. En ef þú vill þetta eigi, þá mun ek þér aldri ásjá veita. (Sts, I, 104)

Even though you think there is a difference between the men, there is also a difference in the responsibility that rests on you. This affair may have dire consequences, and it is better for you that you withdraw voluntarily rather than being separated by force, because you will not enjoy this for long. I will not force you to this now, but I will tell you what is at stake. If you honour my word and go back with your husband willingly, then this will end well. And I can promise you that if you ever need my assistance, I shall give you my full support; that is, if you now act according to my will. But if you refuse, then I shall never give you any help.

Hallgerðr accepted this offer and moved back in with her husband. It is worthwhile to notice how natural it is for the saga writer and for Jón Loptsson that Hallgerðr chooses to stay with the man that took her away. For Hallgerðr the whole matter resulted in a great personal victory. Páll's interest in her proves that she is desired. That also gave her a strong negotiating position at the Thing when she was prevailed upon to go back; she gained the friendship and support of the powerful Jón in her interests, and Jón gained the honour of having solved a difficult case. The best solution, thus, was for the woman to go back of her own will; otherwise there would be a constant suspense over which man and which household she really wanted to belong to.⁷⁸ The sagas thus support the idea that women's status in thirteenth-century Iceland was associated with their desirability in the marriage market.⁷⁹ A combination of family background, property, looks, skills, and actions may have contributed to an individual woman's honour. There is thus little basis to see forbidden visits by lovers in themselves as endangering a woman's personal honour.

⁷⁸ Shortly after, Hallgerðr needed the assistance of Jón when her own daughter was taken away from her: Sts, I, 105.

⁷⁹ Agnes S. Arnórsdóttir, *Konur og vígamenn*.

At the same time, certain provisions in *Grágás* show that women were allotted personal responsibility in the context of seduction and sexuality. Kissing against the woman's will, requests for intercourse, attempted rape, and composition of *mansöngr* were instances in which a woman could take a man to court herself. If the intercourse was actually carried out, however, the case was the responsibility of the woman's guardian.⁸⁰ The woman was liable if she took the initiative to commit fornication with a man. Then she had to pay a fine to her guardian, and if she could not pay, she could be sentenced to servitude until her fine was paid.⁸¹ This indicated that a woman's will in a relationship really did make a difference, and that the law encouraged women to personally resist seducers.

Nevertheless women who pursued extramarital affairs did not lose prestige in the eyes of others. The exception seems to have been women of good family who slept with slaves. According to the Norwegian regional law called the *Gulabingslög*, free women could be sent to the king's farm for forced labour if they committed such an act. Freedwomen were sentenced to return to their previous owner for the same offence.⁸² The unspoken logic behind such provisions seems clear: the woman a man slept with said something essential about the identity of the man himself. Women had to find the right man for a love relationship. If a free woman slept with a slave, she herself chose to define herself as equal to the unfree. Therefore, the logical penalty was for the woman to enter into a relationship of dependency on her guardian and function as a slave in practice as well. This means that women could also do the opposite; they could accept relationships with men who had a high social status in society. In so doing they upgraded their own social status even if that entailed a loss of honour for their guardians. Women's honour and household honour are thus distinct to a certain degree; daughter and father could have separate interests, aims, and strategic means to improve their own appearance in society.

If we search the sagas for examples of women's will in love relationships, we will find many episodes where women actively defend visiting suitors to their guardians, and moreover we discover the methods they use to attract men. *Hallfreðar saga* tells of how Valgerðr and other women watch while the young men play games at an autumn assembly. When the ball is thrown into the crowd she hides it under her dress so that Ingólfr will have to come and get it from her. After this, Ingólfr forgets the game entirely and talks to Valgerðr the rest of the day. The same scene is also described in *Vatnsdæla saga*, which relates that Valgerðr makes clothes for Ingólfr for a long time afterward, even after she has moved out of the valley where Ingólfr lives.⁸³

⁸⁰ Grg, Ib, 47–48; II, 176–77; III, 421–22; cf. Meulengracht Sørensen, *Fortælling*, pp. 235–36.

⁸¹ Grg, Ib, 53; II, 185.

⁸² G 198: 'Ættboren kona legsc með þræle. þa scal hon ganga i konongs garð. oc leysa sic .iij morcom [. . .]. Ef leysingia legsc með þræle. þa scal hon gang i garð skapdrottens sins.'

⁸³ Vatn ch. 38: 'Ingólfr kom at finna Valgerði jafnan, er hann fór til þings eða frá. Þat líkaði Óttari illa; hon gerði honum ok klæði qll, þau er mest skyldi vanda.'

Making clothes for a man is an interesting symbol of female affection and loyalty in the sagas of Icelanders. The main conflict in *Gísla saga Súrssonar* breaks out because a woman would rather sew a shirt for another man than her husband.⁸⁴ Her husband hears of this and kills his rival. The shirt in the saga is an image of the woman's desire to embrace the other man.⁸⁵ In this interpretation of the significance of the shirt we recall Gerðr's promise to give Freyr her embraces. As we have seen, Gerðr's love has an important social significance in the mythological world. A similar thought lies behind the motif of women sewing shirts in the sagas of Icelanders. The man a woman sewed a shirt for indicated where the woman wanted to belong. Since women would normally make clothes for the men of their own household, a shirt made for a man in another household would give a signal that she was undermining her head of household's authority.⁸⁶ The shirt is a tangible sign of a woman's loyalty and love, and as such it could function as a powerful challenge to a *gip-tingarmaðr* or husband's honour.

Women like Hallgerðr Rúnólfsdóttir could to a certain degree play on the social significance of their will. In addition, they could exploit the opportunity to use their own personal kinship and friendship ties to further their wishes. Heiðar-Gróa Hermundardóttir is one example: in the 1190s she is often visited by a certain Bøðvarr, but people think she is not pleased with his visits. Another man, Beinir Sigmundarson, also comes to talk to her. These visits, people believe, are more to her liking.⁸⁷ The saga says that Heiðar-Gróa speaks to an outlawed kinsman, but does not reveal what they talk about. Soon afterward the outlaw takes Beinir with him and kills Bøðvarr.

The conventions of society nevertheless did not allow for 'sexual freedom' in the modern sense. Women's opportunities for direct influence in the economic and public spheres were limited. As a rule, women did not take the initiative; in the episodes we have looked at, they limited themselves to the men who approached them. The men around them wished to control their relationships with other men, and it is easy to imagine how difficult it was for a woman to have a relationship with a man she loved when her father and brothers opposed it.

⁸⁴ Gís ch. 9.

⁸⁵ See Troels Troels-Lund, *Dagligt Liv i Norden i det 16de Aarhundrede*, 14 vols (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1903–04), IX: *Trolovelse* (1903), pp. 144–45: 'Som en Kvinde favnede den Manden [. . .] den Billedtale, som laa i, at en Kvinde skænkede en Mand en Skjorte, [betød] først og fremmest [. . .], at hun var villig til at skænke ham sin Kærlighed.'

⁸⁶ See also Troels-Lund, *Dagligt Liv i Norden*, IX, 146–48. Shirts could also be used to defame the man; Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir made a woman's shirt for her first husband, as a sign of her contempt: Lxd ch. 34.

⁸⁷ Sts, I, 203: 'Bøðvarr ór Felli fór oft þangat ok talaði við Gróu, ok virðu menn sem henni væri ekki um þat. Beinir kom stundum á Heiði ok þótti gaman at tala við Gróu. Ok svá virðu menn, at þetta væri henni at skapi.'

However, women had their methods to enter into advantageous connections with men out of personal interests and to manipulate men's actions to their benefit. By becoming objects for men's socially significant seductions, women gained an important position in the process of seduction. This position was something women knew how to use. Evaluations of women's actions and the significance of their will shows that the ideas we found in the mythological and heroic poems affected Icelanders' understanding of a woman's role in the 'forbidden romantic visit'.

From the point of view of the head of household, therefore, the seduction of 'his' women by other men could be just as serious a crime as rape in the eyes of society; seduction also had the power to change the woman's will. While rape in the modern sense is characterized as sexual intercourse against the woman's will, the Latin term *raptus* originally referred to seizure of all property from a household, including a woman.⁸⁸ The word *raptus* was not used specifically to refer to an assault on a woman until the High Middle Ages. It was consistently used to refer to both abduction and forced intercourse, but under the assumption that the woman resisted her attacker and reported the crime promptly.⁸⁹ What we call rape was in and of itself a serious offence against the woman's guardian, but a seduction created a more enduring conflict between the woman and her *giptingarmaðr* or husband which rocked the balance of all of society.⁹⁰ Romantic relationships created conflicting loyalties for women which made it difficult for women to choose where to belong and resulted in women's emotions having a ripple effect on the wider community.

The sagas show that there was little distinction between love and sexuality in Iceland in the second half of the twelfth century. Relationships between men and women outside of marriage could always generate problems between households.

⁸⁸ James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987), p. 48. See also Suzanne Fonay Wemple, 'Consent and Dissent to Sexual Intercourse in Germanic Societies from the Fifth to the Tenth Century', in *Consent and Coercion to Sex and Marriage in Ancient and Medieval Societies*, ed. by Angeliki E. Laiou (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1993), pp. 227–43.

⁸⁹ Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society*, pp. 247–48. In Nordic law codes, 'rape' (*voldtekt*) was not used as a legal term before the Middle Ages; see also Sigurður Línal, 'Voldtægt, Island', *KLNM*, xx (1976), cols 240–41. The most usual terms for forced intercourse in the early laws are *brytr konu til svefnis* and *taka kono nauðiga*; cf. G 32; G 199; Bj 46; F III 3; F V 45; B II 13.

⁹⁰ A similar relation between 'seduction' and 'rape' also seems to have existed in Ancient Greece; see the discussion in Edward M. Harris, 'Did the Athenians Regard Seduction as a Worse Crime than Rape?', *Classical Quarterly*, 40 (1990), 370–77; David Cohen, 'Consent and Sexual Relations in Classical Athens', in *Consent and Coercion*, ed. by Laiou, pp. 5–16. On the negotiations of rape in law and literature, see also Kathryn Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens: Writing Rape in Medieval French Literature and Law* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1991); Henry Ansgar Kelly, 'Meanings and Uses of Raptus in Chaucer's Time', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 20 (1998), 101–65.

The continuity from the heroic ideals of love is clear. The seducer was like Óðinn with his giant-women; the helpless *giptingarmaðr*, like the giants, lost his power and honour. Men feared the power of words over a woman's thoughts because a woman's love for a man from outside created a clear distinction in an ideally egalitarian household. Love was thus caught up in a discourse on honour, regardless of whether the lover intended to challenge another man or not. In that sense it is clear that love was still a force of chaos at the beginning of the thirteenth century.

The Poetic Discourse of Love

In Scandinavian sources from the early medieval period, we encounter a negative view of men's love. Excessive love-longing positioned the man as submissive both socially and by gender and could also effect a questioning of the social identity of his entire household or social group. This makes it hard to interpret the skaldic verses attributed to skalds who lived in the tenth and eleventh centuries, where themes of unhappy love affairs, love-longing, and praise of women do occur. The fact that these poems are only preserved in manuscripts of the thirteenth century and later makes them dubious as sources to early medieval society. It is a distinct possibility that the skaldic love poems were forgeries, composed in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries under the influence of continental romance and troubadour lyric. Admittedly, the dishonour of men in love found in other sources seems to support this conclusion. On the other hand, men's fear of being in love indicates that they were thought to be capable of passionate longings for women in the early Middle Ages, and the skaldic poems may be a key to our understanding of how people dealt with that problem in early medieval Europe.

This chapter attempts to analyse the skaldic love poems along this latter hypothesis. There are in my opinion good reasons to believe that skalds could express their passionate love in the early Middle Ages, and further that their poems could find a public that preserved them until they were written down centuries later.

Viking Lovers or Pseudo-Troubadours? The Failures of Dating the Skaldic Love Poems

When approaching early Norse love lyrics, we enter a scholarly minefield. In the 1960s, the Icelandic scholar Bjarni Einarsson instigated a rather heated debate on the

dating of the Norse love poems.¹ He argued that their similarities to French troubadour lyric and courtly verse romances should make us suspicious of the late medieval manuscripts' attribution of love lyrics to tenth-century skalds. Instead, he proposed that courtly literature, and especially the romance of Tristan and Isolde, was a necessary condition of the existence of Old Norse love poetry. Some love poems may have been composed as early as the middle of the twelfth century, but when the sagas of Icelanders were written down in the beginning of the thirteenth century these poems became associated with Viking Age skalds. Furthermore, it is not unlikely that the authors of the skald sagas could have composed some poems themselves in order to spice up the story.

In support of Bjarni Einarsson's theory, other poems put in the mouths of tenth-century skalds are evidently composed later.² An example is the love poetry of King Haraldr hárfagri (d. c. 933). According to the late fourteenth-century manuscript *Flateyjarbók*, Haraldr composed a poem (*drápa*) about his sorrow over Snæfríðr, the Finnish girl who according to the sagas made Haraldr forget his duties as king. *Snjófríðardrápa* is now thought to have been composed by the otherwise unknown skald Ormr Steinþórsson in the last half of the twelfth century. Love poetry has also been attributed to the kings St Óláfr (d. 1030) and Magnús inn góði (d. 1047), but for various reasons these should be considered as later interpolations.³

However, this does not mean that *all* love poems by early skalds necessarily are compositions of the twelfth or thirteenth century. Others have argued that these

¹ Bjarni Einarsson, *Skáldasögur: Um uppruna og eðli ástaskáldsagnanna fornu* (Reykjavík: Bókaútgáfa menningarsjóðs, 1961). See also Bjarni Einarsson, *To skjaldesagaer: En analyse af Kormáks saga og Hallfreðar saga* (Bergen: Universitetsforlaget, 1976).

² Many of Gísli Súrsson's skaldic verses are clearly inspired by Christian thought; see Peter Foote, 'An Essay on the Saga of Gisli and its Icelandic Background', in *The Saga of Gisli*, trans. by George Johnston (London: Dent, 1963), pp. 93–134. Other undisputable 'forgeries' include the love poetry of the legendary hero Friðþjófr and the tenth-century Norwegian immigrant Víglundur, both heroes in late medieval bridal-quest saga romances.

³ The whole story of the Finnish girl Snæfríðr's relationship with Haraldr hárfagri is now regarded as legendary, possibly fulfilling some religious/genealogical function; cf. Yngvar Nielsen, 'Den gamle hadeland-ringerikske kongæt og Snefridsagnet', in *Sproglige og historiske afhandlinger viede Sophus Bugges minde* (Kristiania: Aschehoug, 1908), pp. 145–56; Gro Steinsland, *Det hellige bryllup og norrøn kongeideologi* (Oslo: Solum, 1991), pp. 208–11. Important works on the love poetry of the Norwegian kings include Halvdan Koht, 'Var Magnus den gode skald?', *Historisk Tidsskrift*, 5th series, 6 (1927), 576–78; Ólafur Hall-dorsson, 'Snjófríðardrápa', in *Afmælisrit Jóns Helgasonar 30 júní 1969*, ed. by Jakob Benediktsson and others (Reykjavík: Heimskringla, 1969), pp. 147–59; Russell Poole, 'Some Royal Love-Verses', *Maal og Minne*, 1985, 115–31; Else Mundal, 'Heilagmann som sa sex: Lausavise nr. 7 etter Óláfr Haraldsson', *Norskrift*, 42 (1984), 36–57; Inna Matiushina, 'The Emergence of Lyrical Self-expression in Skaldic Love Poetry', *Maal og Minne*, 1998, 21–33. The verses that were probably composed in the twelfth century and later and attributed to earlier kings and heroes will receive more attention in the next chapter.

verses on skalds' love were part of a distinctive Scandinavian love poetry tradition.⁴ Haraldr harðráði's 'erotic' jesting verses (*gamanvísur*) to the Russian princess Ellisif always remain within the heroic skaldic tradition. Magnús berfœttr's verses from around 1100 also appear to have been composed *before* the influence of troubadour poetry became very strong in the North. Other arguments also speak for the verses in question being older than the sagas in which they are preserved. They often fit poorly in the contexts in which they are placed and therefore cannot have been composed by the saga writers. The characteristic skaldic language, with its kennings and form, is a sign that such poetry really could have had roots in Scandinavian tradition.

The debate initially turned on comparisons of genre, literary conventions, and whether the language in the verses in question was archaic or contemporary. The problem is that such arguments are not decisive in favour of either of the two positions. Skalds in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries may have known and used archaic language to liven up accounts of skalds from the past. On the other hand, similar choice of motifs and metaphors for love in Romance and Scandinavian poetry does not necessarily presuppose literary influence from France or England. Most of these verses, then, could have been composed any time between the tenth and the beginning of the thirteenth century.⁵ Here, we will attempt to bypass the philological arguments and try a more sociological approach based on what we already know about the significance of love and skaldic poetry for the individual and society. How likely was it that poetry of love had developed in the early Scandinavian medieval period?

⁴ Einar Ól. Sveinsson, 'Kormákr the Poet and his Verses', *Saga-Book*, 17 (1966), 18–60; Theodore M. Andersson, 'Skalds and Troubadours', *Mediaeval Scandinavia*, 2 (1969), 7–41. See also Bjarni Einarsson, 'The Lovesick Skald: A Reply to Theodore M. Andersson', *Mediaeval Scandinavia*, 4 (1971), 21–41. See also the summary, discussion, and additional arguments for and against Bjarni Einarsson's theory in Anne Holtsmark, 'Kjærlighetsdiktning', *KLNM*, VIII (1963), cols 438–43; Peter Dronke, *Medieval Latin and the Rise of European Love-Lyric*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), pp. 39–42; Klaus von See, 'Mündliche Prosa und Skaldendichtung: Mit einem Exkurs über Skaldensagas und Troubadorbio-graphien', *Mediaeval Scandinavia*, 11 (1978–79), 82–91; Heather O'Donoghue, *The Genesis of a Saga Narrative: Verse and Prose in 'Kormaks Saga'* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991); Matthew James Driscoll, 'Love Poetry, West Norse', in *MSE*, pp. 396–98; Alison Finlay, 'Skalds, Troubadours and Sagas', *Saga-Book*, 24 (1995), 105–53.

⁵ See now the arguments of Kari Ellen Gade for dating most stanzas in *Gunnlaugs saga* as late, and most of the stanzas in *Kormáks saga* and *Hallfredar saga* as most likely from the tenth century: 'The Dating and Attributions of Verses in the Skald Sagas', in *Skaldsagas: Text, Vocation, and Desire in the Icelandic Sagas of Poets*, ed. by Russell Poole, *Ergänzungs-bände zum Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde*, 27 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2001), pp. 50–74.

The Function of Skaldic Poetry in Saga and Society

Court skalds used their poetic skills primarily to praise kings, chieftains, or themselves. Conventional expressions such as ‘the prince who feeds ravens’ can make these poems sound impersonal and superficial. This type of poem is found most often in kings’ sagas, where the skaldic verses are used as historical support for the saga writer’s narrative. The skald’s most important role in this context is as preserver of history and praiser of kings.⁶

Skaldic poetry was less often associated with this propaganda function in Iceland. Poetry gave skalds the opportunity to express personal contemplations on people and society. This may have had to do with the idea that skalds had a close connection to the wisdom of the gods.⁷ The manner in which skalds were educated is unknown to us today, possibly because those involved wanted to keep it a secret; the art of skaldic poetry was surrounded by myths and was therefore seen as an exclusive skill.⁸ We have already encountered skalds who used their poetic skills to insult a rival’s honour or increase their own social status. Skaldic poetry could become a personal form that showed that the poet had the word in his power. The skalds were feared for this reason. Nicknames such as *ormstunga*, *illskáld*, and *vandræðaskáld* indicate that skalds could make trouble for people and society.⁹ A skald’s poem about a man could spread like wildfire through the Icelandic settlements and quickly ruin his reputation.

Knowledge of the skaldic art can also have had a third function. It provides insight into saga characters’ thoughts and emotions without forcing the saga to relinquish its objective tone. In such cases, skaldic verse is not cited as historical proof for an event, but as a subjective, emotional commentary to the objective account of past events. The sorrow, joy, anger, and pride of saga characters is evoked in the verses; such emotions are veiled in saga prose. Skaldic poetry which fulfilled this literary function must also have existed outside the world of the sagas. In the early Scandinavian honour-based society, poetry may have given skalds the ability to put into words

⁶ See Bjarni Einarsson, ‘Lovesick Skald’, for general information on the different types of skaldic poetry, and for a closer analysis of one particular saga, see Diana Whaley, ‘Skalds and Situational Verses in *Heimskringla*’, in *Snorri Sturluson: Kolloquium anlässlich der 750. Wiederkehr seines Todestages*, ed. by Alois Wolf, ScriptOralia, 51 (Tübingen: Narr, 1993), pp. 245–66.

⁷ Carol J. Clover, ‘Skaldic Sensibility’, *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 93 (1978), 63–81; Ursula Dronke, ‘The Poet’s Persona in the Skalds’ Sagas’, *Parergon*, 22 (1978), 23–28.

⁸ Elena Gurevich: “Ok varð it mesta skáld”: Some Observations on the Problem of Skaldic Training’, *Collegium Mediaevale*, 9 (1996), 57–71; Margaret Clunies Ross, ‘From Iceland to Norway: Essential Rites of Passage for an Early Icelandic Skald’, *alvíssmál*, 9 (1999), 55–72.

⁹ The meaning of the word *skáld* may simply be ‘harmful tongue’. Michail I. Steblin-Kamenskij argued that *skáld* is closely related with the English word *scold* and other cognates of pejorative meanings; see his ‘On the Etymology of the Word Skáld’, in *Afmælisrit Jóns Helgasonar*, ed. by Jakob Benediktsson and others, pp. 421–30.

feelings which would otherwise be problematic to express in Icelandic society. The emotional life of medieval people was far from 'spontaneous' as Elias imagines precivilized man. There were many norms that governed which emotions could be expressed openly. Public opinion functioned as a 'superego' as strong as the state (to argue within Elias's Freudian understanding of human beings and history). This means that ancient Scandinavian men and women knew about emotions, even if they were not idealized. One example is a man's sorrow over a dead relative or wife.

Suppressed Tears

Adam of Bremen wrote in the 1070s that the people of the North did not like to shed tears. 'For tears and laments and other signs of sorrow, which we consider healthy, are seen by the Danes with such a severe contempt that they do not shed a single tear over their sins or for a departed loved one.'¹⁰ We also encounter this ideal in the legendary poems. Sigurðr Fáfnisbani is portrayed without emotions; he is lifted above sorrow, fear, and love. This is in contrast to the women, who grieve loudly at the loss of brothers, lovers, or husbands. The Roman historian Tacitus noted in A.D. 98 that the Germanic tribes 'soon have done with tears and laments, but sorrow and sadness do not fade so quickly. It is considered honourable for the women to grieve and the men to remember.'¹¹ On the other hand, the Byzantine historian Procopius wrote in the 550s that Gelimer, the last king of the Vandals, composed a song about his misfortune and grief during the Roman's last siege.¹² Could the norm of not showing tears have existed side by side with the practice among men of composing poems about their sorrows in the early Scandinavian Middle Ages?

¹⁰ Adam of Bremen, *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*, ed. by Bernhard Schmeidler, *Scriptores rerum Germanicum*, 2 (Hannover: Hahn, 1917), book IV, ch. 6.

¹¹ Tacitus, *Germania*, ed. and trans. by Herbert W. Benario (Warminster: Aris & Philips, 1999), ch. 27.

¹² Procopius Caesariensis, *De bellis*, book IV, ch. 6, in *Procopius in Seven Volumes*, ed. and trans. by H. B. Dewing, 7 vols, Loeb Classical Library (London: Heinemann, 1914–40), II: *History of the Wars, Books III and IV* (1916); cf. Daniel Sävborg, *Sorg och elegi i Eddans hjälediktning*, Stockholm Studies in History of Literature, 36 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1997), pp. 177–78, for other examples. King Gelimer is, however, suspiciously described in the manner of a Greek warrior of the heroic times by Procopius, crying like an Achilles in the *Iliad* when confronted by a brother's death (III 19), and when he meets his other brother, Tzazon, they are not able to speak because of their crying when holding hands (III 25). Furthermore, Procopius states that the Vandals were among the softest people he knew of, especially after the capture of Carthage (IV 6). See also Guy Halsall, 'Funny Foreigners: Laughing with the Barbarians in Late Antiquity', in *Humour, History and Politics in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. by Guy Halsall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 89–113.

The norm of not showing one's sorrow was alive and well when the sagas were written in the thirteenth century. Neither grief for a death nor love-sorrow is idealized in the Icelandic sagas. In *Laxdæla saga*, Óláfr pái's reaction to the killing of his son is described in chapter 49: 'When Óláfr Hǫskuldsson heard the news, he took Kjartan's death hard, but nevertheless bore it like a man.' Sorrow about a slain family member was to be associated with the desire for revenge rather than powerlessness. Sorrow without action was tantamount to weakness; it was *ódrengiligr*, 'unmanly'.

This ideal was also applicable to women to a certain degree. In *Gísla saga Súrssonar* we read of the killing of Gísli's foster brother and brother-in-law, Vésteinn. Vésteinn's sister Auðr hardly knows what to think, the saga tells us, but she feels a great deal. In a stanza, she is praised for heroically concealing 'her tears under her linen headdress'. Guðrún's reaction to the killing of her husband in *Laxdæla saga* is also classic. She smiles at the killers as if she were pleased. The killers, however, correctly interpret her smile as a sign of her lust for revenge. When women in the sagas whet their menfolk to revenge, they are displaying their own self-control: showing their grief for their kinsmen *at the proper moment* is crucial to their success.

These accounts were written in the thirteenth century and may exaggerate the saga characters' mastery over their feelings. Nevertheless, they illustrate how difficult it must have been to express sorrow, for example, without a change of countenance. The sagas are succinct in style, but interest in emotional reactions is far from lacking. Standard descriptions of reactions of sorrow in the sagas function as a sign for the audience of how the character felt. While pride regarding one's honour or shame was part of the role of a free man, slaves were associated with emotions such as fear and powerlessness.¹³ That is why the heroes Skarpheðinn and Gunnarr in *Njáls saga* become furious when they are accused of shedding tears of terror and pain. Both men also looked for the best way to avenge themselves and prove that their accusers were wrong. If they had assented to the assertions, they would have risked being put on the same level as slaves.

However, the fact remains that men did express their sorrow in skaldic poetry. If Óláfr pái had been portrayed as a skald in *Laxdæla saga*, it is not impossible that the saga writer would have put a stanza in his mouth about his sorrow for Kjartan. A clear example of what normal emotional reactions were valued is illustrated in the depiction of Egill Skallagrímsson's sorrow. In a well-known scene in *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, we are told how each of Egill's eyebrows goes up and down. The reason was that he had just buried his brother after a great battle in England. The saga writer does not invade Egill's thoughts but is content to describe the outward

¹³ William Ian Miller, 'Emotions and the Sagas', in *From Sagas to Society: Comparative Approaches to Early Iceland*, ed. by Gísli Pálsson (Enfield Lock: Hisarlik, 1992), pp. 89–109; see Lars Lönnroth, 'Kroppen som själens spegel – Ett motiv i de isländska sagorna', *Lychnos*, 1963–64, 24–61; Tore Iversen, *Trelldommen: Norsk slaveri i middelalderen*, Skrifter fra Historisk institutt, Universitetet i Bergen, 1 (Bergen: Department of History, University of Bergen, 1997), pp. 157–67.

signs of his strong feelings. It is only through Egill's poetry that his sorrow is put into words. He composed a poem in memory of his brother in which his pain is depicted in gripping phrases: 'Helnað es þat hylja / harm, ágætum barma' (Egs ch. 55; My sorrow is like death-strife, / but I must conceal my lament).

The death of Egill's son Þoðvarr also made a deep impression on him. After Þoðvarr drowns in a shipwreck, Egill gets in bed and refuses to get up. His daughter Þorgerðr tricks him into writing a poem about his son; the result is *Sonatorrek*, 'the loss (or wreck) of sons'. Egill's chief complaint in this poem is his inability to avenge his son's death. Who can avenge a killing committed by the fjord?¹⁴ This leaves him with only one other way to express his grief: to take the role of the 'old man' and lie in bed. Since revenge is impossible and disgrace irreparable, he might just as well die.

Þorgerðr, his daughter, reminds Egill that he is a skald. Egill discovers that consolation can be had through words:

bó hefr Míms vinr
mér of fengnar
bölva bætr,
es et betra telk.

Göfumk íþrótt
ulfs of bági
vígi vanr
vammi firða. (Egs, sts 23–24)

yet Mimir's friend [Óðinn] has given me compensation for this curse, which I count as gain.

The Fenris-Wolf's adversary [Óðinn], accustomed to battle, gave me a faultless skill.

As a skald, Egill uses his poem to express his feelings, which would otherwise have been cursorily handled in prose. The poem — or even the act of composing it — restores his will to live: 'Egill began to cheer up as he worked on the poem.' Medieval skalds were also familiar with the phenomenon. A good example is to be found in chapter 2 of *Guðmundar saga byskups* where Þorvarðr Þorgeirsson composes an *erfi-flokk* or short funeral poem about his dead brother in 1166 and felt 'he could find consolation about Ari's death by commemorating his courage in verse which would spread far and wide'.

¹⁴ *Sonatorrek*, in particular sts 8–10. A similar connection between the emotions 'grief' and 'desire for revenge' is present in the legendary poems; see Natalia Ju. Gvozdet'skaya, 'Old Icelandic Names of Emotions and the Epic Mind', in *The Audience of the Sagas: Preprints*, vol. 1, The Eighth International Saga Conference (Gothenburg: Gothenburg University, 1991), pp. 159–62. On Egill in bed, see the comments in William Ian Miller, *Humiliation and Other Essays on Honor, Social Discomfort, and Violence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 102–03.

Íslendinga saga's account of a brutal burning in 1253 shows very clearly the difference between skaldic poetry as a medium of emotional expression and the social norm of restraining signs of grief. In 1253, enemies of the chieftain Gizurr Þorvaldsson tried to burn him alive in his house. Gizurr survived, but his wife and children perished. There are two points in particular which have a special significance in the saga's account of Gizurr's emotional reactions. The first is that Gizurr spoke the following verse after the fire:

Enn mank þol þats brunnu
 bauga-Hlín ok mínir,
 skaði kennir mér minni
 minn, þrír synir inni;
 glaðr munat Gǫndlar røðla
 gnýskerðandi verða,
 brjótr lifir sjá við sútir
 sverðs, nema hefndir verði.¹⁵

But I will still remember that misfortune when my gold-adorned Hlín [goddess; lady] and — my loss teaches me to remember — my three sons were burned in the house; the din-destroyer of the valkyrie's sun [the breaker of swords, warrior; that is, Gizurr himself] must be happy in taking revenge; the breaker of swords lives with sorrow.

The second is that Gizurr showed his sorrow only through the verse. The saga tells of his ability to contain his feelings after the catastrophe:

[Gizurr] bar vel af sér harma sína ok var kátr um vetrinn við menn sína ok vini, er til hans kómu. Hann var mikill borði ok lét lítt á sik bíta þat, er at höndum hafði borit. Ok aldri bar honum þá hluti til handa í ófriði eða öðrum mannaunum, at honum kvæði þat fyrir málsvefni standa. (Sts, I, 496)

[Gizurr] knew how to defend himself against his sorrows and was cheerful in front of his men and the friends who visited him. He had a steady disposition and did not let himself be cowed by what had happened to him. Nothing ever happened to him, whether in unrest or danger, that he allowed it to disturb his regular sleep.

Gizurr's sorrow only achieves clear expression through his poems. The saga does say that 'tears streamed from his eyes like hail', but in other sagas such an emotional reaction is a sign of a desire for revenge as much as of sorrow. The saga writer's use of both emotional poetry and 'sensitive skald' prose in this episode sheds light on the tensions that existed between the denigration of expressions of sorrow and the sorrow that we nevertheless find in the poetry. There is little reason to believe that the skalds were seen as 'unmanly' if they composed poems about their sorrow and

¹⁵ Sts, I, 496. On the interpretation of this episode, see Guðrún Nordal, *Ethics and Action in Thirteenth-Century Iceland*, The Viking Collection, 11 (Odense: Odense University Press, 1998), pp. 48–50; Marlen Strand Ferrer, 'Middelaldermenneskets emosjonelle atferd: Et uttrykk for en kompleks psykologi', *Historisk tidsskrift*, 80 (2001), 147–72 (pp. 151–54).

helplessness in the face of destiny. To judge by the sources, it was acceptable to compose poetry about sorrow; it gave it grandeur and significance. If the sorrow had not been great, it would not have been particularly manly to control it.

This is an important point, because it indicates that skaldic verses expressing feelings were intended for a wider public. A skald could turn to the public to make them understand the anguish he bore. A few examples may point to persons who themselves were not skalds using emotional poetry composed by others to express their sorrow. The Eddic heroic poem *Guðrúnarhvot* describes Guðrún's grief for her dead family members. She has lost everything — her husband Sigurðr, her brothers, her daughter Svanhildr — and she is now sending her sons to avenge her daughter's death; the journey will end with their deaths as well. The final stanza is directed to the audience, both men and women:

Jǫrlum ǫllum
snótum ǫllum
at þetta tregróf
óðal batni,
sorg at minni,
um talit væri. (*Guðrúnarhvot* 21)

May the lot of all 'earls' [men] improve, and ladies' sorrows be lessened, because this lamentation has been recited.

The stanza indicates that the audience is being offered a form of grief therapy, and it is perhaps a sign of a general need for psychological poetry in the Viking Age. *Land-námabók* tells of a more personal need to express one's sorrow which existed among those who were not skalds themselves. Egill Vǫlu-Steinsson asked Gestr Oddleifsson to 'give him advice about how his father could be relieved of the deathly sorrow he had for Ǫgmundr, his son. Gestr composed the first part of *Ǫgmundardrápa*.' Two verses of the *drápa* attributed to Vǫlu-Steinn are preserved in *Snorra Edda*.¹⁶ Either he completed a *drápa* begun by Gestr and so worked himself out of his sorrow as Egill Skallagrímsson did, or Gestr completed the *drápa* later for Vǫlu-Steinn to use for himself.

For those who were skilful in the skaldic art there existed the possibility for an alternative, emotional discourse for sorrow, vulnerability, and emotion through poetry. In poetry, otherwise 'forbidden' emotions found legitimate expression, and such poetry was also in demand among those lacking poetic gifts. This may have helped stanzas with emotional content be remembered right through from the Viking Age, perhaps associated with an oral narrative of the situation in which the skald

¹⁶ Lnd (S), ch. 142; SnE, p. 93 (st. 37), 167–68 (st. 315). Vǫlu-Steinn was himself a skald; see Sigurður Nordal, *Íslandske streifyls* (Bergen: Universitetsforlaget, 1965), pp. 50–65. Nordal even suggested that Vǫlu-Steinn composed *Vǫluspá*. This attribution is no longer generally accepted; see Gro Steinsland and Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, *Völuspá* (Oslo: Pax, 1999), pp. 36–38.

composed the verse. This in turn would have made it possible for those who knew about the emotional poetry of the skalds to understand and express their own sorrow.

A similar link between the denigration of ‘weak’ feelings in a social structure where honour, deeds, and status are more important than individual feelings, but at the same time where such feelings are expressed in a different, more personal structure, can be found in another honour-based culture. The anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod has studied the relationship between honour and personal poetry in a Bedouin community in North Africa. She found that events such as the loss of a family member and star-crossed love affairs were surrounded by an everyday style of speech which, together with certain behaviour patterns, indicated that the individual was unmoved by what had happened. It was a language, or a discourse, which corresponded with the society’s honour ideology. However, the same individuals had a poetic language in which they expressed their laments for deaths or lost loves. To transfer these private, sentimental discourses over to common everyday speech was not accepted. To face one’s destiny was a social imperative, but expressing sorrow within a poetic discourse did not threaten the stability of society or the poet’s integrity. Likewise, tragic love stories and myths could be woven into such poetry because it highlighted how difficult it was for a person to conform to social norms. The poem, therefore, was created in an environment of tension between the individual’s feelings and interests and the society’s expectation of conformity. That the majority did submit themselves to society’s norms implied that individuals actually chose to do so in spite of their own inclinations to the contrary.

Thus, we should not exclude the possibility of early Norse love verses because of the stigma attributed to the masculine loving subject in several sources. Even Óðinn, the god of the warriors and the skaldic mead, is sometimes found in subversive positions, being the passive partner in a love relationship or seeking knowledge of the future from a woman. The skalds seem to have had access to a poetic language of emotions that may have strengthened the rules of emotional behaviour in everyday life, but also functioned as a channel for dangerous feelings and as such was a traditional discourse that could be invoked in case of social and cultural change.

Signs of Love-Sorrow

From the slight detour into other emotions, we now return to our real subject: men’s love-longings. If we allow that an emotional discourse already existed in skaldic poetry in Egill Skallagrímsson’s time, we cannot rule out the possibility that love with elements of sorrow and longing might have been expressed in the early Scandinavian medieval period. I am not going to discuss every last skaldic stanza in the Icelandic sagas which has love as its theme, but will be content to observe that the existence of a poetic discourse for other emotions makes it possible that skalds at least *could* have composed poems on love in the Viking Age, also in view of what we know from elsewhere about the emotional norms and love mentality in that period.

We will focus on two skalds who wrote poetry for or about women, poetry which few philologists doubt originated in a time before troubadour poetry could have had much influence. Of the Norwegian kings before the twelfth century, we have seen that love poetry was attributed to five of them, but only two, Haraldr harðráði (d. 1066) and Magnús berfœttr (d. 1103), are thought to have actually composed the stanzas. The two kings' verses are especially interesting because they depict different attitudes among the king's retainers to the love of women than the one described above in chapter 3. The verses are also interesting because they show two different ways of addressing women in skaldic verse before 1100. Are we confronted here with a distinctive Scandinavian love poetry created before the age of the troubadours?

Haraldr harðráði is more associated with skaldic poetry than any of the other Norwegian kings. He liked to have skalds around him as well as dabbling in the noble art himself. The kings' sagas tell that Haraldr made some *gamanvísur* about the woman he would later marry, Ellisif, while he was in Garðaríki. These verses have less to do with Ellisif than with the skald himself; he composes poetry, rides well, swims fast, fights boldly. The refrain tells us that the lady nevertheless would not have him: 'Þó lætr Gerðr í Gørðum / gollhrings við mér skolla' (But the girl from Garðaríki wished for revenge on me).¹⁷ Haraldr's interest in a high-born woman has led some researchers to believe that Haraldr's verses show the influence of eleventh-century Sicilian love lyric. Admittedly, Haraldr stayed at the Byzantine court in the 1030s, so this theory is not outright impossible. Still, the refrain reflects to a large degree traditional Scandinavian conceptions of love. Haraldr compares Ellisif with Gerðr, the uninterested giant maiden in *Skírnismál*. That Haraldr did not receive Ellisif's love makes her just as antisocial as Gerðr was to Freyr. Perhaps it had become known that Ellisif did not want to marry Haraldr. Haraldr's jocular verse might then have been intended as an ironic self-defense to his men.¹⁸

The love poetry attributed to Magnús berfœttr is characterized by much more sorrow and longing after women than we have seen to this point. In *Morkinskinna* are preserved four verses where Magnús longs for the (presumably Scottish) king's

¹⁷ *Haralds saga harðráði* ch. 15. Haraldr's jesting verses are only partially preserved. According to the kings' sagas, there were sixteen stanzas with the same refrain. One stanza is recorded in *Fagrskinna* (ch. 51) and six more in *Morkinskinna* (pp. 85–86). On Haraldr's interest in skaldic poetry, see Gabriel Turville-Petre, *Haraldr the Hard-ruler and his Poets* (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1968).

¹⁸ On Haraldr's visit to Kiev in 1046, see Knut Berg, 'Haralds dronning Ellisif', in *Harald Hardråde*, ed. by Arno Berg (Oslo: Dreyer, 1966), pp. 28–40. Fragments of Haraldr's *gamanvísur* have also been found on rune-sticks from Bryggen in Bergen dating to c. 1300, which perhaps indicates the existence of traditions, possibly in romance form, which were connected to the meeting between Haraldr and Ellisif later in the Middle Ages; see Karin Fjellhammer Seim, 'Fragment av Harald Hardrådes gamanvísur overlevert i runer på Bryggen i Bergen', *Maal og Minne*, 1986, 30–41.

sister Maktildr¹⁹ and a verse where he refuses to flee during a surprise attack by the Irish because he is in love with a girl (the verse uses the Irish word *ingian*) in Dublin.²⁰ A few of the verses are traditional in the sense that they are preoccupied with the woman's opinion of the poet and not vice versa, for example when Magnús says he is happy because Maktildr considers him an honourable king.

Nevertheless, we do encounter a more lamenting, longing form of love poetry than with Haraldr harðráði. The best example is perhaps this stanza attributed to King Magnús góði Ólafsson:

Margr kveðr sér at sorgum
sverðrjóðr alin verða
(uggit allítt seggia
óttu) búkarls dóttur;
enn ef einhver bannar
eldgefn fyrir mér svefna
víst veldr síklings systir
svinn andvöku minni. (*lausavísa* 2; Skj B, I, 304)

Many a sword reddener [warrior] claims that the farmer's daughter causes him grief; I care very little for men's fears. Yet, if a certain fire-Gefn [goddess; woman] deprives me of my sleep, it is certainly the sagacious sister of the king who causes my unrest.

Here we have a skaldic stanza which expresses a man's love, a longing which brings forth sorrow, pain, and sleeplessness for the skald. The verse indicates that Scandinavian warriors actually did fall in love with some of the women they met on their voyages over the seas. At the same time we see that the skald portrays them as *afraid* of this happening. Love itself is not idealized; the verse focuses instead on the problems such feelings could create for the warrior's masculine identity. Men longed for a woman's love and recognition while at the same time considering that an *excessive* longing made a man inferior and weak, which plunged them into an emotional dilemma in their encounters with women.

¹⁹ Msk, st. 79. The verses cited below were erroneously attributed to Magnús inn góði; see the discussion in Koht, 'Var Magnus den gode skald?'; Poole, 'Royal Love-Verses'; and Theodore Andersson and Kari Ellen Gade, 'Introduction', in *Morkinskinna: The Earliest Icelandic Chronicle of the Norwegian Kings (1030–1157)*, trans. by Theodore M. Andersson and Kari Ellen Gade, Islandica, 51 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), pp. 37–38. The identification of Maktildr is uncertain, but the best guess is Matilda, daughter of Malcolm III and Margaret. She was married to Henry I in 1100, but there are indications of close links between the Scottish and Norwegian kings at this time. However, Matilda's baptismal name was Edith; she only changed her name after her marriage to Henry I in November 1100.

²⁰ Msk, st. 219. This stanza is also found in Fsk ch. 71, but not in Hkr; see Roberta Frank, *Old Norse Court Poetry: The Dróttkvætt Stanza*, Islandica, 42 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), pp. 177–78.

In the Norwegian warrior environment, Magnús's verse is the only indication of an early love poetry. Similar elements of longing and sorrow are also present, however, in the poems of the Icelandic skalds about women they loved but could not have. Love-sorrow is most commonly expressed in those poems by saying that the woman was born to bring the skald misery, as in this poem by Gunnlaugr ormsstunga:

Alin vas rýgr at rógi,
runnr olli því Gunnar,
(lög vask auðs at eiga
óðgjarn) fira þornum.²¹

The lady was born to be a source of strife to the sons of men. The valkyrie-tree [warrior; that is Gunnlaugr] caused that; I was eager to marry the treasure-log [woman].

Kormákr Ögmundarson says that his love would 'increase his sorrows' and is a hindrance to happiness: 'gollmens Fríðar / hvarma tungls ok hringa / Hlínar ópurpt mína' (The beam of the eyelid's edge [gaze] of Fríðr [goddess] of the gold necklace [woman] will cause unhappiness for me and the Hlín of rings [woman]).²²

However, in a few instances we hear of skalds who believe that women bring men gladness, preferably in retrospect. Björn breiðvíkingakappi uttered the following verse after a happy meeting with a woman:

alls í aptan, þella,
ek tegumk sjalfr at drekka
opt horfinnar erfi,
armlinns, gleði minnar.²³

As in the evening, o pine sapling of bracelets [woman], I often drink the funeral-ale [farewell toast] to my gladness.

Kormákr calls Steingerðr a 'ljós línu Hlín [. . .] líkn sýnir mér' (bright goddess of the linen headdress [. . .] comforter of my mind).²⁴ What the woman does to bring such happiness is, as usual, to give a man her embraces or love: 'At axllimar yðrar, auð-Frigg, myni liggja, hvít, á heiðis landi / hliðar mér of síðir' (That your white arms, my gold-Frigg [lady], might lie at last around the slope of my hawk's land [hawk's land = arm, slope of hawk's land = shoulders]).²⁵

²¹ GnI, st. 19; see also st. 4.

²² Krm, sts 3, 58; cf. 54.

²³ Eyr, st. 24; cf. st. 30. In Hall, st. 26, Hallfreðr remembers his 'good days' with a woman. See also Skj A, I, 109, where Hallbjörn Oddsson laments having to say goodbye to his 'delight', that is, a woman.

²⁴ Krm, st. 20; cf. Gís, st. 38: 'Fals halla skal Fulla / fagrgleit, sú mik teitir' (The bright-faced stone-Fulla [goddess; woman] will make me cheerful).

²⁵ Krm, st. 62; cf. sts 60–61.

The skald's longing for his beloved's embrace can be interpreted in the light of the heroic conceptions of love we found in both court and heroic poetry.²⁶ At the same time, there are strong allusions to Freyr's love and longing for Gerðr in *Skírnismál*. Like Icelandic skalds, Freyr sees a woman's *arms* as an important part of the body: 'armar lýstu / enn af þaðan / alt lopt ok lǫgr' (her arms gleamed, and from them the air and sea catch light), he says of Gerðr in stanza 6. A woman's gleaming arms are a symbol of her acknowledgement, her embrace, and her love of her suitor. We have seen that Haraldr harðráði created an ironic distance from a woman's refusal, while Freyr, Kormákr, and Magnús berfœttr all suffered the absence of a woman's embraces. Sleeplessness and laments about how women bring skalds grief are surely a traditional Scandinavian expression of men's love-longing. It is certainly something completely different from the idolization of Love found in courtly poetry, but nevertheless an acknowledgement of woman's important position in man's social and masculine identity in the early Scandinavian Middle Ages.

Out of the Closet, and Back in Again

There is one important difference between the North African Bedouins and medieval Scandinavian skalds. Old Norse poetry could function *both* in an inward, individual context and in 'public' concepts of honour. This could create problems for skalds suffering from love-sorrow in Iceland since, as we have seen, poetry such as *mansǫng* was easily confused with the skalds' role as outsiders and slanderers. Let us examine a final example from *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar* which illuminates the problematic connection between *mansǫng* as a means of emotional expression and as a challenge to honour.

After his brother's death, Egill Skallagrímsson wanted to marry his widowed sister-in-law, Ásgerðr Bjarnardóttir. She was slow to respond to his advances, and Egill sat and moped the whole winter at the home of his good friend — and Ásgerðr's close relation — Arinbjörn Þórisson. Arinbjörn asked Egill why he sat so idle day in and day out with his head covered by his cloak. Egill then spoke two verses. First he complains that he does not know how he should act towards the woman he desires:

Ókynni vensk, ennis,
ung, þorðak vel forðum,
hauka klífs, at hefja,
Hlín, þvergnípur mínar;
verðk í feld, þás, foldar,
faldr kœmr í hug skaldi

²⁶ See also Hall, sts 4, 22, and 27, where Hallfreðr longs for the woman's kisses and to be in her arms, and Band, st. 6, about a fight between two men for a woman's embrace.

berg — ‘óneris’, brúna
brátt miðstalli hváta. (Egs, st. 23)

The goddess of the hawk-cliff [woman] grows used to my discourtesy. Once, when young, I dared readily lift my cliffs across the forehead [eyebrows]. Now I am obliged to thrust my block between the brows [nose] into a cloak when *gerðr* [ON ‘headdress’] of *áss* [ON ‘ridge’] comes into the poet’s thought.

[The pun whereby Egill conceals Ásgerðr’s name is more complicated than the above translation indicates, since Egill, having split her name into two syllables, then substitutes for those syllables other words with a similar meaning.]

In the second verse, Egill tells why he was careful about composing poetry about his love:

Sef, Skuldar felk sjaldan,
sorg, Hlés vita, borgar,
í niðjerfi Narfa
nafn aurmýils, dafnar,
þvít geir-Rótu gøtva
gnýþings bragar fingrum
rógs at ræsis veigum
reifendr munu þreifa. (Egs, st. 24)

I rarely conceal in the giants’ drink [poetry] the name of the goddess of stone [woman] related to me by marriage. The sorrow of the town of the sea’s fire [woman] subsides. Some rousers of the valkyrie’s clash [warriors] dabble with fingers of poetry into Óðinn’s mead.

In the saga, these verses are explicitly called *mansǫngr*. But here we encounter a far less aggressive tone than in poems associated with *nið*. According to the saga, Egill does not want anyone to lose honour on account of his love poem. He tries to conceal the woman’s name by using *ofljóst* (hiding her name in kennings).²⁷ Egill wants to hide the identity of the woman of his thoughts. The skald’s own feelings, rather than his opponent’s negative sides, are the most important aspect in these verses. However, Egill is afraid his poetry will be understood as such; he does not want to offend Arinbjörn. He is afraid it will put their friendship in danger. This episode thus acknowledges the connection between love poetry and society’s opinion of such revelations as dishonourable, regardless of the content of the exchange.

²⁷ Margaret Clunies Ross has highlighted the significance of *all* poetry by men for women being composed in *ofljóst*, focusing particularly on the verses Grettir Ásmundarson composed for Þorbjörg Óláfsdóttir to thank her from saving him from hanging (Fóst ch. 1; Grs ch. 52). In the saga this is not an erotic situation, but the verses nevertheless allude to the mythic, erotic relationships such as that of Hagbarðr’s with Signý, and Óðinn when he was helped by Gunnlǫð; cf. Margaret Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes: Old Norse Myths in Medieval Northern Society*, vol. II: *The Reception of Norse Myths in Medieval Iceland*, The Viking Collection, 10 (Odense: Odense University Press, 1998), pp. 72–74.

Egill's love song is one of many indications that men loved women in the early Scandinavian Middle Ages, *and* that they composed poetry about it. In this chapter, I have argued that skaldic poetry gave men a legitimate language for their love. It is therefore not unlikely that some of the love verses preserved in medieval manuscripts may have been composed during the Viking Age. Individual verses about skalds' love could have been preserved because they were examples of the strong tensions that existed between individual wishes and society's norms. However, none of the skalds reflected on the nature of love in their verses in the early medieval period. Love was more a source of fear and frustration than an ennobling influence. Ideas of honour made men's love dangerous for society, regardless of how 'harmless' the love poetry was intended to be. This friction must have given a lot of 'social energy' to early love poems, with negotiations over their interpretations.²⁸ In the next chapter, we will examine the attempts that were made to separate love from the discourse on honour.

²⁸ Cf. Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 6.

A New Scenery for Love

The conflict between love and masculine honour was widespread in the period 1150–1230, in both Norway and Iceland. In a few skalds' and kings' sagas from that time, however, the hero is portrayed as a lover. Egill Skallagrímsson's *mansœngr* can be interpreted as a desire to express his love for a woman without it leading to conflict between men. This desire must be seen in light of the waves of influence coming from elsewhere in Europe in the latter half of the twelfth century. These influences idealized love between a man and a woman in troubadour lyric and courtly culture. In Scandinavia, we can trace a dawning idealization of love from the 1150s onward. This chapter will consider how new tendencies from continental Europe were received in the North and to what degree they shaped traditional attitudes, especially with respect to the male lover.

Even if there is broad agreement that Old Norse literature was influenced by European trends, ideas vary widely with regard to the extent and significance of courtly cultural imports in the period before 1230. Here, we shall focus primarily on who used the European love poems and to what degree the courtly conception of love was modified to fit in with Scandinavian culture.

The Twelfth-Century Norse Renaissance

The term 'twelfth-century renaissance' has become established as an expression of a development within the culture of the High Middle Ages, although the usefulness of the concept of 'renaissance' has been highly disputed.¹ Nevertheless, a corresponding

¹ For some critical assessments, see R. N. Swanson, *The Twelfth-Century Renaissance* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999); Jacques LeGoff, 'What Did the Twelfth-Century Renaissance Mean?', in *The Medieval World*, ed. by Peter Linehan and Janet L.

Norse renaissance has only been discussed since the late 1980s, particularly with reference to the construction of a Norse prehistory.² Just as Geoffrey of Monmouth traced the ancestors of the Britons back to King Brutus of Troy in his *Historia Regum Britanniae* (1136), Snorri Sturluson claimed that Norwegians and Icelanders were descended from the Trojan king Munon (or Mennon). At the same time, interest in the native Norse tradition grew. From the twelfth century onward, long genealogies were produced tracing the Norwegian royal house back to heroes like Sigurðr Fáfnisbani or Ragnarr loðbrók, as well as Adam and Eve, Munon, and the euhemerized god Óðinn. Icelanders did not have kings as such, but the most prominent families were firmly convinced that they were branches of the same lineages from which the Norwegian kings were descended. Thus the Icelandic aristocracy also connected itself with biblical genealogy, antiquity, and the other European nations.³

Fascination with the heroic past also manifested itself through a renewed interest in skaldic poetry. In the Orkneys, *Háttalykill* ('Key to Poetry') was composed in the 1140s, and in the 1220s the Icelander Snorri Sturluson wrote his *Edda*, which was intended first and foremost as a textbook of skaldic poetry. This would hardly have been necessary unless there had been a wish to know and use the old myths and heroic deeds once more.⁴ Old skaldic verses were used as sources for writing the kings' sagas, and in Iceland they were also incorporated into the text to bear witness to Icelandic skalds' subjective experience of the events the saga prose describes. Many of the first sagas of Icelanders are about skalds and alternate between the 'objective' saga style and the skald's own commentary on a situation. Such a use of skaldic poetry was not only of antiquarian value, but linked the poets and audiences

Nelson (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 635–47; C. Stephen Jaeger, 'Pessimism in the Twelfth-Century Renaissance', *Speculum*, 78 (2003), 1151–83.

² Lars Boje Mortensen, 'Det 12. århundredes renæssanse i Norge: Teoderik munk og Romerriget', in *Antikken i norsk litteratur*, ed. by Øivind Andersen and Asbjørn Aarseth, Skrifter utgitt av Det norske institutt i Athen, 4 (Bergen: Nordisk institutt, University of Bergen, 1993), pp. 17–35; Ole Bruhn, 'Earl Rognvald and the Rise of Saga Literature', in *The Viking Age in Caithness, Orkney and the North Atlantic*, ed. by Colleen E. Batey, Judith Jesch, and Christopher D. Morris (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), pp. 240–47; Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, 'Skjaldekvald og sagaer', in *Nye tilbakeblikk: Artikler om litteratur-historiske hovedbegreper*, ed. by Audun Dvergsdal (Oslo: Cappelen, 1998), pp. 41–56.

³ An important inspiration was of course Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*. Not only is the genealogy similar in the two works, but also the positions of the Welsh of the 1130s and the Icelanders in the 1220s were at least comparable; both lands were on the verge of being dominated by a foreign king; see John Gillingham, *The English in the Twelfth Century* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2000), pp. 3–39.

⁴ On the uses of skaldic poetry in Iceland at this time, see Kari Ellen Gade, 'Poetry and its Changing Importance in Medieval Icelandic Culture', in *Old Icelandic Literature and Society*, ed. by Margaret Clunies Ross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 61–95; Guðrún Nordal, *Tools of Literacy: The Role of Skaldic Verse in Icelandic Textual Culture of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001).

of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries with the heroes of the past, or vice versa: old stories could be interpreted in a new light. We encounter the first sign of an interest in the old love stories in the Orkneys, where a new emphasis on a man's desire for a woman is expressed in skaldic poetry.

Rognvaldr Kali and 'Midons de Narbona'

In the twelfth century, the Orkney Islands were an earldom rather loosely held by the Norwegian king. The Church was established in the Orkneys in the middle of the century as a bishopric under Níðaróss. Two Orcadian skalds in particular are known for their verses on women and love in the second half of the twelfth century. One was Rognvaldr Kali Kolsson, Earl of the Orkneys from 1129 until he was killed in 1158, and the other was Bjarni Kolbeinsson, Bishop from 1188 to 1223.

Rognvaldr Kali Kolsson was the son of a Norwegian chieftain and grew up in Norway. In 1129 he was appointed Earl of the Orkneys by King Sigurðr jórsalafari, but he did not win control over the islands until 1136. Rognvaldr's claim to the title of earl was through his mother, who was the sister of Earl Magnús, who was killed by his brother in 1115 and canonized in 1135. It was Rognvaldr who began the construction of St Magnús Cathedral in Kirkjubágr (Kirkwall) in 1137 and who moved the bishop's see there. The Earl clearly had a strong interest in an association with St Magnús; the lineage and the earldom were closely connected with the Magnús cult.⁵ Rognvaldr himself was killed in 1158 and canonized in 1192, but his cult does not ever appear to have been widely popular.

Rognvaldr was a strong proponent of reviving the old skaldic arts, in terms of both content and function. He was a chieftain who liked to have skalds around him and was a talented skald himself.⁶ With the Iclander Hallr Þórarinnsson, he composed *Háttalykill* in the 1140s. It was probably inspired by Latin textbooks of poetic metre; however the content, rattling off ancient heroes from Sigurðr Fáfnisbani to Magnús berfœttr, shows how he applied European learning in a uniquely Norse way.⁷

⁵ Per Sveaas Andersen, 'The Orkney Church of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries – a Stepdaughter of the Norwegian Church', in *St Magnus Cathedral and Orkney's Twelfth-Century Renaissance*, ed. by Barbara E. Crawford (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1988), pp. 56–68; Barbara E. Crawford, 'The Bishopric of Orkney', in *Ecclesia Nidrosiensis 1153–1537: Søkelys på Nidaroskirkens og Nidarosprovinsens historie*, ed. by Steinar Imsen (Trondheim: Tapir, 2003), pp. 143–58.

⁶ Paul Bibire, 'Poetry of Earl Rognvaldr's Court', in *St Magnus Cathedral*, ed. by Crawford, pp. 208–40 (p. 216).

⁷ Bruhn, 'Earl Rognvald', p. 241; Meulengracht Sørensen, 'Skjaldekvald', p. 43; Bjarne Fidjestøl, 'Sogekvæde', in *Deutsch-Nordische Begegnungen: 9. Arbeitstagung der Skandinavisten des deutschen Sprachgebiets 1989 in Svendborg*, ed. by Kurt Braunmüller and Mogens Brøndsted (Odense: Odense University Press, 1991), pp. 57–76 (p. 63).

Rognvaldr himself presented his skills thus:

Tafl emk qrr at efla,
 íþróttir kannk níu,
 týnik trauðla rúnum,
 tíð er mér bók ok smíðir.
 Skríða kannk á skiðum,
 skýtk ok ræ'k, svát nýtir,
 hvárt tveggja kannk hyggja
 harpslött ok bragðottu. (Os, st. 34; Skj B, I, 478, *lausavísa* 1)

I know nine skills; a champion at chess, runes I hardly ruin, I am used to books and smithing. I know to how to ski, shoot, and row satisfactorily, and I can evaluate both harp-playing and verse-making.

The verse is a fairly traditional enumeration of skills. The similarity to Haraldr harðráði's jesting verses is striking.⁸ Harp-playing (which the hero Gunnarr Gjúkason was also known for), skiing, and skaldic poetry are named together. The new skills Rognvaldr boasts are playing chess, carving runes, and reading books. The latter put his relationship to literature and poetry in a whole different light than his skaldic predecessors. Rognvaldr was conscious that his poetry was literary, that it was intended to be written down.⁹

A certain degree of continuity can be found in the skaldic poetry from Haraldr harðráði's time to Rognvaldr's. Rognvaldr's father was himself a noted skald in Norway. What made the poetry of the Orkneys unique in relation to Norwegian court poetry was that the skaldic environment there seems to have been created consciously through the competence of Icelandic skalds,¹⁰ that the poems were used consciously in historiography and self-representation, and that the poems were used in an environment open to European cultural trends.

In 1151, Earl Rognvaldr went on crusade. On the way to the Holy Land, he and his company stayed for a while in Narbonne. The story of Rognvaldr's visit to Narbonne, as it is described in *Orkneyinga saga*, gives an exciting and unique insight into the Norse skalds' encounter with Provençal court culture. Rognvaldr is invited to the court of Viscountess Ermengard, and the saga provides many of the skaldic verses he and two Icelandic skalds composed about her. At the same time, Ermengard was known

⁸ Msk, p. 86 (st. 61). On Haraldr's *gamanvísur*, see above, chapter 3.

⁹ A good example of this is when he and his crusaders encounter Saracens in battle on the way to Jerusalem. After one battle, the skalds disagree as to what actually happened. Earl Rognvaldr is given the task of composing the 'official' version of the battle, a version that is so well formulated that all are satisfied. It was this version that was written down and survived in *Orkneyinga saga*; cf. Os ch. 88; Bruhn, 'Earl Rognvald', p. 241.

¹⁰ There are hardly any skaldic verses about the Orkney earls after the death of Earl Þorfinn in 1067; cf. Bibire, 'Poetry', p. 215. This makes it more likely that the skaldic milieu surrounding Rognvaldr was conceived of as a revival.

for surrounding herself with troubadours, including Peire Rogier, Peire d'Auvergne, and Bernard de Ventadour. Their poetry reflects some of the concepts associated with courtly love. For example, Peire Rogier praises the joy of loving from a distance (*amour de lonh*), while Bernard de Ventadour held that nothing made a man more distinguished than love for and service to a woman; from this derives all that is characterized as good (*fin'amors*). A sensual but problematic love for an idealized woman ennobled a man and made him a better person than he otherwise would have been.¹¹ For these troubadours, Ermengard was 'Midons de Narbona', or just 'Narbona'. In Andreas Capellanus's *De Amore*, Ermengard stands out as one of the French noblewomen who pass judgement in cases of love.¹² Narbonne, then, was not the worst place to be for a skald interested in European trends in the middle of the twelfth century. Did this meeting leave a mark on Norse ideas about love, and particularly masculine subjugation through desire in Norse culture and society?

The Scandinavian crusaders were fascinated by what they saw on the shores of the Mediterranean, including the women. In the first verse Rognvaldr is said to have composed to Ermengard, he praises her beauty:

Víst'r at frá berr flestu
Fróða meldrs at góðu
vel skúfaðra vífa
vøxtr þinn, konan svinna.
Skorð lætr hár á herðar
haukvallar sér falla,
átgjörnum rauðk erni
ilka, gult sem silki. (Os, st. 55; Skj B, I, 482, *lausavísa* 15)

Certainly, wise woman, your tresses are fairer than most women with golden locks.
The hawk-plain's [arm's] supporter let hair, yellow as silk, fall on to her shoulders — I
reddened the greedy eagle's claw.

In Rognvaldr's other verses, he dedicates his whole crusade to Ermengard; he longs for her and wants to return to Narbonne as soon as possible:

Orð skal Ermingerðar
ítr drengr muna lengi;
brúðr vill røkk, at ríðim
Ránheim til Jórðanar.
En er aptr fara runnar
unnviggs of haf sunnan,

¹¹ Georges Duby, 'The Courtly Model', in *Silences of the Middle Ages*, ed. by Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, A History of Women, 2 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 250–66; C. Stephen Jaeger, *Ennobling Love: In Search for a Lost Sensibility* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999).

¹² Andreas Capellanus, *On Love*, ed. and trans. by P. G. Walsh (London: Duckworth, 1982), Book II, ch. 7, pp. 256–64.

ristum, heim at hausti,
hvalfrón til Nerbónar. (Os, st. 56; Skj B, I, 482, *lausavísa* 16)

The glorious man will long remember the words of Ermengard; the lady wants us to ride on the sea to Jordan. But when the sea-rider returns home from the southern sea in the autumn, we shall plough the land of whales back to Narbonne.

Many scholars have believed that these two verses are an early example of the influence of troubadour poetry.¹³ First, Rognvaldr praises the woman in troubadour style by extolling her beauty, and second, he continues on his crusade at her word; in other words, love for her encourages him to good deeds. However, Rognvaldr is following the old skaldic tradition when he boasts of reddening the eagles' talons.¹⁴ The description of Ermengard's appearance can also be said to follow Norse conventions; the parts of Ermengard Rognvaldr envisions are her long blond hair and her arms. Such vague indications of a woman's appearance accord with the sparse descriptions of the female body in Norse poetry (and prose).¹⁵ Nor was struggling with thoughts of a woman unknown in Norse warrior culture. As we have seen, skalds could address women in battle before 1150 as well. When Rognvaldr later fights against the Saracens, this very aspect comes to the fore:

Vón ák, út á Spáni
var skjótt rekinn flótti,
flýði margr af mæði
menlundr, konu fundar.
Því erum vér, at vöru
væn hljóð kveðin þjóðum,
valr tók völl at hylja,
verðir Ermingerðar. (Os, st. 63; Skj B, I, 483, *lausavísa* 20)

I hope to meet the lady — out in Spain the fleeing were swiftly driven away, many men fled in weariness. Splendid poems were spoken to people, while corpses covered the field — we have proven ourselves worthy of Ermengard.¹⁶

¹³ Bjarni Einarsson, *To skjaldesagaer: En analyse af Kormáks saga og Hallfreðar saga* (Bergen: Universitetsforlaget, 1976), p. 19; Anne Holtmark, 'Kjærlighetsdiktning', in *KLNM*, VIII (1963), cols 438–43 (col. 441).

¹⁴ Theodore M. Andersson, 'Skalds and Troubadours', *Mediaeval Scandinavia*, 2 (1969), 7–41 (p. 11); Roberta Frank, *Old Norse Court Poetry: The Dróttkvætt stanza*, *Islandica*, 42 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), p. 167.

¹⁵ Jenny M. Jochens, 'Before the Male Gaze: The Absence of the Female Body in Old Norse', in *Sex in the Middle Ages: A Book of Essays*, ed. by Joyce E. Salisbury (New York: Garland, 1991), pp. 3–29 (pp. 12–14).

¹⁶ Other stanzas by Rognvaldr on Ermengard are in the same vein; see Os, sts 59, 61, 63, 64, 66, 69, 75. The similarity between these stanzas and e.g. Gís, st. 38 and Krm, sts 30, 33, 70, 71 are striking. Sigmundur Þngull Andr sson, one of Rognvaldr's companions on the crusade, also combined his thoughts on a woman back home with his accomplishments abroad (Os, st. 62).

Rognvaldr's following in Narbonne also includes two Icelandic skalds, Oddi litli Glúmsson and Ármóðr skáld. They each compose a verse about Ermengard as well. Ármóðr dreams of sleeping next to Ermengard for just one night:

Ek mun Ermingerði
nema qnnur skop verði,
margr elr sorg of svinna,
síðan aldri finna.
Værak sæll, ef ek svæfa,
sýn væri þat gæfa,
brúðr hefr allfagrt enni,
eina nótt hjá henni. (Os, st. 57; Skj B, I, 511, *lausavísa* 3)

I will never meet Ermengard again, unless another fate causes it — many suffer grief for the wise [woman]. I would be blessed if I slept — pure grace it would be — one night with her. The lady has a most beautiful forehead.

This verse has been seen as too 'vulgar' to have been influenced by troubadour lyric. At the same time, the woman is identified with happiness, perhaps inspired by the troubadours' *joie*. This ecstasy, however, does not involve feelings of love per se, but is reminiscent of the traditional wish to obtain a woman's love and embraces. Oddi is more circumspect in praising the queen:

Trautt erum vér, sem ek vætti,
verðir Ermingerðar,
veitk, at horsk má heita
hlaðgrund konungr sprunda,
þvít sómir Bil bríma
bauga stalls, at öllu
hon lifi sæl und sólar
setri, miklu betra. (Os, st. 58; Skj B, I, 510, *lausavísa* 2)

We are hardly worthy, I reckon, of Ermengard — the ground of embroidery may be called, I know, a king among women. Much better befits the woman; may she live happily beneath the sun's seat.

For Oddi, Ermengard is completely unattainable. She is described as second to none, a 'king' among women. While Rognvaldr's crusade in Ermengard's name may seem shallow, it is possible to interpret Oddi's longings as inspired by the troubadours' often inferior social position to the women they loved.¹⁷ The most significant departure from the older Norse skaldic tradition is that the social context is new. Oddi is apparently aiming to praise Ermengard's beauty and greatness along the lines of traditional encomium. Since he cannot praise her warrior prowess, he idealizes her by making her an object for his admiration and love. Freed from the balance of honour between households, Oddi's verse could be understood in a positive light as praise poetry for a woman and not taken as an attack on her male relations.

¹⁷ Andersson, 'Skalds and Troubadours', p. 20.

For what purpose were the verses of Rognvaldr, Oddi Glúmsson, and Ármóðr skáld composed? There are many possibilities: they may have been presented to Ermengard herself at her court in Narbonne; they might have been composed on the journey after meeting the queen as something to remember her by; or they could have been composed as entertainment for a Norse audience at home. The first alternative is not very likely; the language of the Norse skalds was hardly understandable to Ermengard or her court, unless Rognvaldr's interpreter on the journey, the French-speaking Bishop Vilhjálmr, managed to translate them for her. Rognvaldr and his skalds nevertheless seem much more conscious that the poems they composed on that journey would enhance their image at home. On the one hand, Rognvaldr's verses project an image of himself as a skald and Viking with allusions to traditional warrior ideals. On the other hand, Rognvaldr consciously uses skaldic poetry to relate to his 'modern' audience, which was somewhat familiar with both new European ideals and learned Latin culture. His role as a skald and Viking became a Norse parallel to the troubadour and knight.

An important side of the Norwegian crusaders' visit to Narbonne is that the saga also succeeds, despite the fact that the content could be interpreted as *mansöngur*, in putting the skaldic poems in a context in which they were not connected with challenging other men. On their return, these verses may have been presented as a sequence associated with the visit to Narbonne.¹⁸ The saga author further develops the episode and clearly wants to depict the meeting between Rognvaldr and Ermengard in a way that gives Rognvaldr the most possible honour. *Orkneyinga saga* was begun not long after Rognvaldr's death in 1158. It is thought to have been written by an Icelander in close collaboration with Rognvaldr's kinsman, Bishop Bjarni Kolbeinsson.

The saga emphasizes that Rognvaldr and his men were given an illustrious reception in Narbonne.¹⁹ They are invited to feasts by the most prominent men in the city. Rognvaldr is the one who is shown the most honour, according to the saga. Such a reception at a foreign court is only paralleled in Sigurðr jórsalafari's visit to foreign princes at the beginning of the twelfth century. Sigurðr stays at the courts of many princes on his journey: Count Roðbert of Sikiley (Roger II, Count of Sicily 1105–28, King of Sicily 1130–54); King Baldvini of Jórsal (Baldwin I of Jerusalem, 1100–18), who gives Sigurðr a piece of the True Cross; and Emperor Kirjalax in Miklagarðr (Alexios I Komnenos, 1081–1118), who has fine cloth laid out on all the streets of the city when Sigurðr enters it.²⁰ These depictions may of course have become

¹⁸ Alison Finlay, 'Skalds, Troubadours and Sagas', *Saga-Book*, 24 (1995), 105–53 (pp. 115–16).

¹⁹ Os ch. 86. On the date, authorship, and revisions of *Orkneyinga saga*, see Finnbogi Guðmundsson, 'On the Writing of *Orkneyinga Saga*', in *Viking Age*, ed. by Batey, Jesch, and Morris, pp. 204–11.

²⁰ Hkr:Mss chs 8–13; Ágr ch. 55: Msk, pp. 348–52 (chs 61d–63); TM ch. 33. On the various literary representations of Sigurðr's crusade, see Marianne Kalinke, '*Sigurðar saga Jórsalafara*: The Fictionalization of Fact in *Morkinskinna*', *Scandinavian Studies*, 56 (1984), 152–67.

somewhat exaggerated in the hundred years that lay between the event and the record, but can still tell us something about how a king or earl wanted to portray his visit to a foreign court to a native audience in the twelfth century.

If we compare Rognvaldr's reception in Narbonne with Sigurðr jórsalafari's grand tour and Rognvaldr's other court visits during the crusade, we can see clear differences in how the saga author imagined a court where a king presided and a court where they were received by a woman. After a tour through the Holy Land, Rognvaldr and his men go to Miklagarðr, one of the most important cities on the Mediterranean. How they are received there has great significance for the reputation of the journey as a whole: 'They took much care in sailing, and sailed then with great finery, as they knew Sigurðr jórsalafari had done.'²¹ They are received well by King Menelías of Miklagarðr (Emperor Menelaus, 1143–80). Rognvaldr receives both good gifts and great honour; the Prince of Byzantium regards him and his men as the best.

When the 'king' is a woman, as in Narbonne, the honour is awarded in a somewhat different manner. According to the saga, Ermengard had inherited the castle of Narbonne from her father, Earl Germanus. She ruled this patrimony with the help of the most noble and capable kinsmen and advisors. It is these men who advise her to invite these travellers from afar to feast with her. Not until a few days of feasting and revelry have gone by does Ermengard show herself to her guests:

Þat var einn dag, er jarl sat at veizlunni, at drottning gekk inn í hollina ok margar konur með henni; hon hafði borðker í hendi af gulli. Hon var klædd inum beztum klæðum, hafði laust hárit, sem meyjum er títt at hafa, ok hafði lagt gullhlað um enni sér. Hon skenkti jarli, en meyjarnar léku fyrir þeim. Jarl tók hönd hennar með kerinu ok setti hana í kné sér; ok tóluðu mart um daginn [. . .]. Staðarmenn fýstu jarl at staðfestask þar ok mæltu mjök á verðr um at þeir myndi gipta honum frúna. (Os ch. 86)

One day, when the earl was seated at the feast, the queen walked into the hall followed by many ladies. She had a serving-bowl of gold in her hands. She was dressed in her finest clothes, and wore her hair loose, as maidens often do, and she wore a golden headband on her forehead. She served the earl, and the maidens entertained them. The earl took her hand along with the bowl and put her in his lap, and they spoke much that day [. . .]. The townspeople tried to get the earl to settle down there, and they were eager to talk about marrying him to the lady.

Despite this tempting offer, Rognvaldr leaves and continues on his journey. He never comes back to Narbonne.

The saga is undoubtedly concerned with giving an accurate but also idealized picture of Ermengard to a Norse audience. Ermengard is portrayed as a great chieftain's daughter who, since she has no brothers, has inherited her father's entire estate. The description of a young unmarried woman with long blond hair bears a strong resemblance to images of women in skaldic poems and sagas. Another distinctly Norse

²¹ Os ch. 88: 'Þeir vönduðu þá mjök siglingina ok sigldu þá með prís miklum, sem þeir vissu, at gort hafði Sigurðar Jórsalafari.'

element in the narrative is that Ermengard pours Rognvaldr a drink and sits on his lap to talk to him. The feast is depicted in the Norse manner, and Rognvaldr seems to take advantage of the custom of drinking with a partner, as was customary at a feast, occasionally between men and women as well.²² The woman who offers a drink to the best warrior is also known from Anglo-Saxon tradition, most famously when Queen Wealhþeow offers a drink to him who is worthy to take the place of her dead husband. The historian Michael Enright has concluded from a study of various archaeological finds and literary sources that women in the *comitatus* have had the role of choosing the successor when a leader died. The Norse presentation of Ermengard is not simply of a courtly lady but rather of an interim leader of a *hirð* that needs Rognvaldr's services.²³ Therefore, it is not only the wish of the men of the city that is used by the saga to underscore Rognvaldr's honourable reception; Ermengard gives him honour as well through her actions at the feast.

The striking construction of the meeting between Rognvaldr and Ermengard as described in the saga is made clearer when we look at the French sources. Ermengard had inherited Narbonne as a child from her father, Aimery II, in 1134 and served as viscountess from 1143 until she was deposed by her nephew in 1192 or 1193. By 1151, when Rognvaldr came to Narbonne, she had already been married twice. In 1142 she had been married against her will to Alphonse Jordan, Count of Toulouse, who wanted to get control over Narbonne. The local aristocracy objected to this turn of events, and with support from the French king Louis VII, Alphonse Jordan was repulsed and his marriage to Ermengard annulled in 1143. Soon afterward she married Bernard of Anduze, one of the leaders in the fight against Alphonse Jordan. Bernard of Anduze did not leave behind much of a trail in the sources; he seems to have stayed more frequently in Montpellier than in Narbonne in the years that followed. Of the relatively many documents preserved from Narbonne in this period, Ermengard seems omnipresent but Bernard is almost totally absent. Nor were there any children born to the couple. In 1151, Ermengard already may have been a widow; as the crusaders from the North understood that her father had recently died, this may indicate a confusion with Bernard, or it may mean that her husband was simply never present or mentioned.

It seems that Ermengard succeeded in freeing herself from her husbands' power partly by placing her domain under the king's protection. Louis VII was naturally

²² Narratives featuring women pouring drinks at a feast and choosing a man are found in *Egils saga* and *Ynglinga saga*. The custom of drinking in pairs, *tvímenning*, also appears (in perhaps a rather romanticized form) in *Kormáks saga*.

²³ *Beowulf*, ed. and trans. by Michael Swanton, 2nd edn (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), lines 607–41; cf. Michael J. Enright, *Lady with a Mead-Cup: Ritual, Prophecy and Lordship in the European Warband from La Tène to the Viking Age* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1996), pp. 42–59. In the Norse material, there are various depictions of women with a drinking horn in their hands on gold plaques and runestones which *may* imply that women could occupy such a role in a non-hereditary succession.

interested in having a mainstay in the rather unruly south of France, and in exchange for loyalty to him, Ermengard received the King's personal support against neighbouring rivals and malcontent vassals.²⁴ This was a contributing factor which made it advantageous for young courtiers and troubadours to be loyal to Ermengard. The sources paint a picture of Ermengard as an active, independent woman who would hardly have wanted to hand over the reins to a Norse crusader. A mercenary commission would probably have been a more likely offer to be extended to Rognvaldr and his following.

The saga's interpretation of Rognvaldr's meeting with Ermengard nevertheless seems to have had the desired effect at home. All Norway was very impressed with the account of the adventure: 'This journey became very famous, and all those who had made it were considered greater men ever afterward.'²⁵ That the skalds' verses about Ermengard were later used in *Orkneyinga saga* bears witness to their use by Rognvaldr and his men to tell how distinguished Ermengard was and how honourable it was to receive an offer of marriage to her. It is difficult to say whether the skalds and the saga author interpreted the events in the Mediterranean lands differently; but the survivors of the journey to the banks of the Jordan seem to have been well satisfied with the saga's version of the visit to Narbonne.

It was no coincidence that Earl Rognvaldr in particular used the meeting with Ermengard to his own advantage. He was well acquainted with the Norse skaldic tradition and more in touch with the continent than his predecessors. By idealizing the context in which love was expressed (Ermengard was entitled to give her personal recognition and love to the visiting Rognvaldr without her male relatives losing honour), the resulting image is of a social situation in which love can be freed from the dangerous discourse of honour. To a certain degree it is legitimate for a warrior to express his longing for a woman in a more public context, even if none of the crusader-skalds acted on the feelings described in their verses. Rognvaldr made a bid for Ermengard's love in a social milieu far from his own; the danger of creating an imbalance between ideally equal men was then less imminent. Thus, influences from the ideals of courtly love do not go very deep in the story of Rognvaldr's visit to Narbonne. However, such ideals may have spread deeper in the Orcadian aristocracy than the saga suggests. Love's place in the poetry of the Orkneys had developed by the end of the twelfth century into a significant contribution to Norse poetry as a whole. That is due not least to Rognvaldr's close kinsman and friend, Bishop Bjarni Kolbeinsson.

²⁴ Fredric L. Cheyette, 'Women, Poets, and Politics in Occitania', in *Aristocratic Women in Medieval France*, ed. by Theodore Evergates (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), pp. 138–77.

²⁵ Os ch. 89: 'Ok varð þessi ferð in frægsta, ok þóttu þeir allir miklu meira háttar menn síðan, er farit hǫfðu.' The crusade of Earl Rognvaldr is also mentioned in Msk, p. 441 (ch. 95) and Hkr:Hss ch. 17, but both these versions are more concerned about the deeds of Erlingr skakki and thus make no mention of the visit to Narbonne.

Bishop Bjarni's Confessions

A typical aspect of the Norse renaissance in the late twelfth century was its new focus on the heroes of the past. Skaldic poetry was also characterized by this aspect in the latter half of the twelfth century. It was in the skaldic milieu of the Orkneys that many of the longer heroic poems (*sögukvæði*) that survive were composed.²⁶ These poems tell the deeds of legendary kings and heroes and include *Krákumál* (about Ragnarr loðbrók, unknown poet), *Búadrápa* (about the battle of Hjörungavágr, by Þorkell Gíslason), *Jómsvíkingadrápa*, *Málsháttakvæði*, and *Snjófriðardrápa*. In these poems, the tales of heroes are given a new angle. We will look in greater detail at the latter three poems, since they show a particular interest in men's feelings of love. All three poems are connected with Bjarni Kolbeinsson, Bishop of the Orkneys from 1188 to 1223.

Bjarni is best known as a diplomat in the rather strained relationship between the Orkney Islands and Norway around 1200.²⁷ Earl Haraldr Maddaðarson had supported an uprising against King Sverrir in 1196. When the uprising was quelled, the Norwegian king began to exert stricter control over the islands. Bjarni himself was a kinsman of the Earl, and was behind the canonization of Earl Rögnvaldr in 1192. He had a wide range of contacts on the continent, in Norway, and in Iceland. He must have been a major driving force in the skaldic milieu in the Orkneys in the period, and many have asserted that he was responsible for the extant version of *Orkneyinga saga*.

In *Jómsvíkingadrápa*, Bjarni is apparently building on an early written version of the saga of the Jómsvikings and the battle of Hjörungavágr.²⁸ The story of the Jómsviking Vagn Ákason is central to both the saga and the *drápa*. Vagn's mission is not simply to acquit himself admirably in the battle of Hjörungavágr, but also to kill the Norwegian chieftain Þorkell leira and marry his daughter. And this, miraculously, he manages to do. As *Jómsvíkinga saga* tells it, the exploit is more about challenging the woman's father than love for the woman. We have already seen that the Birki-beinar had an appreciation for the challenge Vagn presented to the established aristocracy. But it is not this aspect that Bishop Bjarni emphasizes in his retelling of the battle. He uses Vagn's destiny to confess his own love-sorrows:

²⁶ Fidjestøl, 'Sogekvæde'.

²⁷ Anne Holtmark, 'Bjarne Kolbeinsson og hans forfatterskap', *Edda*, 37 (1937), 1–17 (pp. 2–3).

²⁸ This poem is probably the earliest preserved version of the legendary story of the Jómsvikings; cf. John Lindow, 'Narrative and the Nature of Skaldic Poetry', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 97 (1982), 94–121 (pp. 109–14); Theodore M. Andersson, 'Kings' Sagas (Konungasögur)', in *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide*, ed. by Carol J. Clover and John Lindow, *Islandica*, 45 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1985), pp. 197–238 (p. 215); John Mearns, 'Studier i Jómsvíkinga sagas stemma: Jómsvíkinga sagas fem redaksjoner sammenlignet med versjonene i *Fagrskinna*, *Jómsvíkingadrápa*, *Heimskringla* og *Saxo*', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 115 (2000), 125–82.

Hendir enn sem aðra
 óteitan mik sútar,
 mér hefr harm á hendi
 handfögr kona bundit;
 þó emk óð at auka
 ærit gjarn at hvóru;
 mjök em ek at mér orðinn
 ógæfr of fōr vifa. (st. 3, Skj B, II, 1)

Sorrow's unhappiness
 happens to me like others,
 a lady with beautiful
 arms has bound me in grief.
 Yet I'm still very keen
 to create this poem,
 I've been so unlucky
 in my dealings with ladies.²⁹

The *drápa*'s refrain repeats this theme of the poet's star-crossed love for a married woman time and again:

Ein drepr fyr mér allri,
 ótrauðr á lög skeiðum
 qrr þengill bað ýta,
 itrmanns ona teiti.

The gentleman's wife, she
 robs me of all my joy.
 The noble lady causes
 me cruel suffering.

In stanza 4, the parallels between the past and present are made clear; here, Vagn is introduced as a young man who loved a woman long ago, while the poet himself assures his audience that he treasures his own memories of the woman he loves. When the poet comes to Vagn's vow to marry Þorkell leira's daughter, he is again overwhelmed with sorrow (st. 14). Vagn's success is contrasted with the poet's failure. In the saga, the reader is only informed that Vagn aims to humiliate Þorkell by sleeping with his daughter. In the poem, on the other hand, Vagn is also portrayed as a skald. In stanza 41, Þorkell is said to be furious when Vagn recites a *mansöngur* to Þorkell's daughter. Here, Bjarni is playing on *mansöngur*'s double function as a challenge and as a poetic expression of the skald's strong feelings. It is the latter function that Bjarni stresses here. The challenge to the girl's father is also softened,

²⁹ Translations are from Judith Jesch, 'The Song of the Jomsvikings', in *The Triumph Tree: Scotland's Earliest Poetry, AD 550–1350* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1998), pp. 225–35.

as Þorkell — in contrast to the saga's version of events — is not killed. The situation ends happily with peace and a wedding.³⁰

Thus, the poem presents an entirely different slant on Vagn's story than we find in the saga. The *drápa* is a personal interpretation by a poet in a particular emotional situation.³¹ We can also identify other aspects that make this *drápa* especially personal compared to many other skaldic poems. It is remarkable that the poet does not want others to hear his *drápa*. For Bjarni, it is not 'Ýggr's booty' (skaldic wisdom) that drives the poem, as it is with most other skaldic verse.³² It is love that fuels the poet's interest in Vagn's story, and not, as in the saga, a fascination with Vagn's heroic leap in status. The *drápa* reinterprets an old story into a new, 'modern' form through the eyes of a poet in love.

Jómsvíkingadrápa is not unique in this. It is similar in many ways to the contemporary *Snjófriðardrápa*. Only fragments of this *drápa* are preserved, but it is believed to have been composed by the otherwise unknown skald Ormr Steinþórsson. Based on the theme and wording of the verses, Ormr was probably an Icelander and a relatively well-educated man with some clerical education. The *drápa* demonstrates knowledge of *Jómsvíkingadrápa* and was probably composed in connection with the skaldic milieu in the Orkneys.³³

Whereas the contemporary kings' sagas portray Haraldr's love for Snæfriðr as a weakness surrounded by destructive magic, in *Snjófriðardrápa* we are presented with Haraldr's own feelings about what happened. Haraldr finds words for his sorrow after the death of his queen, Snæfriðr; he dwells on his sorrow because he cannot restore his beloved to life. He even wishes to be buried with her so that their bodies will become one. As in *Jómsvíkingadrápa*, the poem does not just treat the love-sorrows experienced by the main character, but the skald parallels it with his own longing for his beloved. The legend of Snæfriðr and Haraldr hárfagri's

³⁰ Jvs, pp. 44–45. Cf. Daniel Sävborg, *Sorg och elegi i Eddans hjältediktning*, Stockholm Studies in History of Literature, 36 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1997), p. 155. Sävborg also notes similarities between *Jómsvíkingadrápa* and the heroic poem *Gripisspá*, where Sigurðr's own love is elaborated much more than elsewhere in the Sigurðr cycle (esp. st. 29). *Gripisspá* is probably a late poem, and it is tempting to suggest that it was made in connection with or inspired by the skaldic milieu of the Orkneys.

³¹ Thomas Krömmelbein, 'Creative Compilers: Observations on the Manuscript Tradition of *Snorri's Edda*', in *Snorrastefna*, ed. by Úlfar Bragason, Rit, 1 (Reykjavík: Stofnun Sigurður Nordals, 1992), pp. 113–25 (pp. 124–25).

³² Carol Clover, 'Skaldic Sensibility', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 93 (1978), 63–81.

³³ Ólafur Halldórsson, 'Snjófriðardrápa', in *Afmælisrit Jóns Helgasonar 30 júní 1969*, ed. by Jakob Benediktsson and others (Reykjavík: Heimskringla, 1969), pp. 147–59 (pp. 156–59); Russell Poole, 'Ormr Steinþórsson and the *Snjófriðardrápa*', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 97 (1982), 122–37 (pp. 122–23, 133). The stanzas attributed to *Snjófriðardrápa* are found partly in the late manuscript *Flatexjarbók* (Flat, I, 582) and partly in *Snorra Edda*. I use here the edition in Poole, 'Ormr Steinþórsson'.

demented sorrow after her death thus inspired a skald at the end of the twelfth century to express the strong hold love had on him.

The third poem from the Orkneys that we will examine only makes sporadic mention of love. *Málsháttakvæði* has also been attributed to Bjarni Kolbeinsson and is preserved in the same manuscript as *Jómsvíkingadrápa*. The poem shares many elements in common with the *drápa* about the Jómsvíkings. It uses traditional material about the gods and ancient heroes together with the poet's love-sorrow. The skald is not afraid to recite his poem aloud; whoever wants to hear may do so, as far as he is concerned. At the same time, the skald shows that he has a broad familiarity with the Latin learned tradition.³⁴ It is therefore not improbable that it was Bjarni who composed this poem as well, although we cannot rule out the possibility of another cleric having composed it later in the thirteenth century.³⁵

Most of the poem is a collection of proverbs and sayings with examples from myths and legends. The poet's attitude to love is not sorrowful and bitter, but rather distant and almost ironic.³⁶ He tells of Óðinn's love for Billing's maiden (sts 3–4), and of the skald Qlvir hnúfa's love for Sólveig in Norway (st. 25). One stanza refers especially to Haraldr's love for Snæfriðr:

Ekki var þat forðum farald,
Finnan gat þó ærðan Harald,
hönnum þótti sólþjört sú,
slíks dæmi verðr mǫrgum nú. (st. 11, Skj B, II, 140–41)

There were no plagues in the old days, but the Finn-girl still enchanted Haraldr from his wits; he found her bright as the sun, this happens to many nowadays.

Many are 'blinded by love' (*ástarblindir*), the skald tells us; that is what *mansǫngr* is all about (st. 20). The use of the term *mansǫngr* in connection with blind love only reinforces the impression that this type of verse had taken on a form of complaint and longing by the skald's time. The lightly ironic tone of the stanza may be a dig aimed at a more comprehensive love poetry in the first decades of the thirteenth century. If the poem really was composed by Bjarni, it may be that as an aging bishop he was becoming a bit sceptical of the new mode, even though all indications were that he was an active player at the very beginning of it. But Bjarni was not the first, nor would he be the last, who would help found a new school of art or literature only to abandon it as popularity swelled and what was original became conventional.

³⁴ Holtsmark, 'Bjarne Kolbeinsson', pp. 10–14; Poole, 'Ormr Steinþórsson', pp. 135–36; Hermann Pálsson, 'A Florilegium in Norse from Medieval Orkney', in *The Northern and Western Isles in the Viking World: Survival, Continuity and Change*, ed. by Alexander Fenton and Hermann Pálsson (Edinburgh: Donald, 1984), pp. 258–64 (pp. 261–62).

³⁵ Hermann Pálsson, 'Florilegium', passim.

³⁶ Holtsmark, 'Bjarne Kolbeinsson', p. 12.

Why was Bjarni Kolbeinnsson, a bishop, central in making men's love a popular theme in skaldic poetry? We should remember that clerics were also very active in composing love lyrics elsewhere in Europe. Granted, William IX of Aquitaine (1071–1127), who is considered the first troubadour, was concerned with his ability to seduce as many women as possible. But the monk Guibert of Nogent (c. 1064–c. 1125) admits in his autobiography that he composed and distributed love poetry inspired by Ovid as early as the eleventh century.³⁷ The philosopher Peter Abelard (1079–1142) was, like Guibert, also acquainted with the poetry of Ovid. As his relationship with Heloise blossomed, he composed many love verses. He writes in his autobiography, *Historia Calamitatum*, that 'a lot of these songs, as you know, are still popular and sung in many places, particularly by those who enjoy the kind of life I led'.³⁸

Abelard's students in Paris were many; one of them became pope (Celestine II), while about fifty became cardinals, and many others occupied lower positions in the Church. His influence also extended to itinerants and poor students, often called *vagants* or *goliards*. This group of learned outsiders lacked permanent positions or travelled from town to town to listen to famous professors. Their place in society was unclear; they existed alongside established society. It seems that this group questioned their own social and masculine identity through poetry.

The famous poem *Anni parte florida* (or *Phyllis and Flora*) from *Codex Buranus* presents the conflict between a knight (*miles*) and a clerk about which of them was

³⁷ Guibert de Nogent, *De vita sua, sive monodiae*, I 17; trans. by John F. Benton, *Self and Society in Medieval France*, Medieval Academy Reprints for Teaching, 15 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), p. 87.

³⁸ Peter Abelard, *Historia Calamitatum*, ch. 6; translation from *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, trans. by Betty Radice (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), p. 68. Heloise praised these love songs in her first letter to Abelard and claimed that they made every woman love him and envy her; see *ibid.*, p. 115. Some of the poems in *Carmina Burana*, in particular *Hebet sidus*, are suggested as the work of Abelard, or at least inspired by the love story; see Peter Dronke, *Medieval Latin and the Rise of European Love-Lyric*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), pp. 313–18. Guibert later strongly regretted making such poems, but probably other young students around 1100 were not as likely to renounce their poetry. As Guibert himself stated, through his love poems he sought 'worldly glory' and 'a lover's urbanity' — urbanity not merely in the Ciceronian tradition (in the sense of being a virtuous statesman), but also in the Ovidian sense as opposed to *rusticitas*. In his youthful love poems, Abelard may have shared these motivations with the Latin poets of the Cambridge Songs, the Regensburg Songs, Marbod of Rennes, and Baudri of Bourgueil; cf. Jaeger, *Ennobling Love*; Gerald Bond, *The Loving Subject: Desire, Eloquence, and Power in Romanesque France* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995). Just as the distinction between Latin and vernacular love lyrics is deconstructed, the boundaries between 'sublime' love tradition and the 'low' tradition of bawdy poems also crumbles; cf. Moshe Lazar, 'Carmina Erotica, Carmina Iocosa: The Body and the Bawdy in Medieval Love Songs', in *Poetics of Love in the Middle Ages: Texts and Contexts*, ed. by Moshe Lazar and Norris J. Lacy (Fairfax: George Mason University Press, 1989), pp. 249–76.

the best and most worthy lover. The cleric's advocate, Flora, praises him for his knowledge of the wisdom of Venus: 'My cleric is pre-eminent in knowledge and instruction in the power of Venus and of the god of love. It is through the cleric that the knight has become a follower of Venus.'³⁹ The cleric cannot prove his courage in battle, nor can he ride in shining armour, impress onlookers by his prowess in tournaments, or give great banquets in his own castle, but he is a good lover! The dynamic and extent of *vagant* lyric is based to a certain degree in men's quest for a social identity through traditional male roles. Such a use of love can be seen among clerics in positions not related to the Church hierarchy. At the French and English courts, it was the clerics who were concerned with the new courtly ideals. It is among these men that we find some of the most important innovators in the literature of courtly love, such as Chrétien de Troyes at the end of the twelfth century. His genius was in reshaping old stories and knightly tales and making the characters into ideals and examples of courtly behaviour for the contemporary court.⁴⁰ Andreas Capellanus's work on courtly love, *De Amore* from the 1170s, is also a clear witness to the link between learned Latin culture and courtly behaviour.⁴¹

It seems that this dialogue between a new humanistic movement which saw man as the centre of the universe, a consciousness of the power of emotion over the individual, new social groups, new codes of conduct for aristocracy and clerics, and the moral aspirations of scholars and clerics was well known to Bishop Bjarni in the Orkneys. As he indicates in *Jómsvíkingadrápa*, he understood the stories of past heroes in the light of his own experience and social context. For Bjarni, the traditional heroic ideals were not the most interesting aspect of the stories; he was a cleric, not a warrior. His position in society was completely different from Vagn's, and he expressed his sorrow in love in a far more personal style than saga prose gave room for.

Therefore, Bjarni may have had a role similar to that of Chrétien de Troyes and other French court clerics. Both were representatives of a group that had little

³⁹ Translation from P. G. Walsh, *Love Lyrics from the Carmina Burana* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), p. 113 (st. 41).

⁴⁰ C. Stephen Jaeger, *The Origins of Courtliness: Civilizing Trends and the Formation of Courtly Ideals 939–1210* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985); Sarah Kay, 'Courts, Clerics, and Courtly Love', in *Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, ed. by Roberta L. Krueger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 81–96.

⁴¹ From depicting the art of love in two books, Andreas turns the tables in Book III. Here reasons are listed why love should be shunned and despised. Much effort has been invested in discussing what the real opinion of Andreas was, whether the didactic work of Books I and II, or the renunciation of love in Book III, but it may be safer to use his work as a source to the various discourses in which love was set in the late twelfth century; for the clerics the game of love is both appealing for learned men and diabolically seducing for the chaste men of the Church; for the aristocracy love is both a game with precious prizes and one where they are most often rejected by women; cf. Don A. Monson, 'Andreas Capellanus and the Problem of Irony', *Speculum*, 63 (1988), 539–72.

interest in proving their skill in battle and sought alternative ways to distinguish themselves. Bjarni may have been central to the development of a skaldic school which sought to romanticize the Viking period. Although we know little of the poetry of such a school, many of the individual verses about heroes from the tenth century could hardly have been composed at the time.⁴² This new poetry played a part in reinterpreting love's power into a more peaceful context where love and honour *could* coexist. The skald no longer sought to prove himself superior to a *gip-tingarmaðr* in honour; instead he began to dwell on his own sorrow and subjective feelings.⁴³ Even though Norse skalds had long composed poems about love's sorrows, now they openly take the part of the 'weak' and lovelorn Óðinn and Haraldr hárfagri. Even if the form and content remain within the Norse tradition, the inspiration for the re-evaluation of old heroes may well have come from troubadour poetry.

Learned priests throughout the Norse cultural area may have contributed to an increased import of love poetry into the North. This meant that priests could easily be connected with the seduction of women. The *Speech Against the Bishops*, written in the late 1190s on the instigation of King Sverrir (1177–1202), condemned those clerics that 'lure other men's wives and daughters or other female relatives to intercourse, more than any imprudent or unlearned man ever would do'.⁴⁴ Thus, priests were worse than the warriors Sverrir himself tried to control in the late twelfth century! This may seem like an unfair judgement, but it was probably evidence of a reaction against the knowledge young students received along with their studies: not just theology, grammar, and law, but Ovid and Venus too. The speech's negative attitude to the seductive arts of priests indicates that the new love lyrics were relatively removed from the *hirð* ideals of Sverrir and his contemporaries. That would change in his grandson Hákon Hákonarson's time.

⁴² Such poetic sequences could have been used as entertainment in Iceland in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, as the famous account of the wedding at Reykjahólar in 1119 suggests. The priest Ingimundr uses poems of his own composition in a story he tells about the legendary skald Ormr Barreyjaskáld; cf. Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, *Fortælling og ære: Studier i islændingesagaerne* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1995), pp. 42–50. Sverrir Tómasson notes that Snorri Sturluson's defence of reliability of the skaldic poetry as a historical source in his prologue to *Heimskringla* suggests that 'forged' poems about the past were well known in his time; see Sverrir Tómasson, "'Sögu ljóð, skrök, háð": Snorri Sturluson's Attitude to Poetry', in *Úr Döllum til Dala: Guðbrandur Vigfússon Centenary Essays*, ed. by Rory McTurk and Andrew Wawn, Leeds Texts and Monographs, n.s., 11 (Leeds: University of Leeds, 1989), pp. 317–27.

⁴³ Inna Matiushina, 'The Emergence of Lyrical Self-Expression in Skaldic Love Poetry', *Maal og Minne*, 1998, 21–33.

⁴⁴ SvR, p. 3: 'vela konor manna æða döttr æða adrar frendkonor mædr legorde meir en nokor annara skamsýnna manna olædra'.

The Love of Kings and Skalds

Did Icelandic skalds like Ármóðr, Oddi Glúmsson, and Ormr Steinþórsson bring new impulses back to the island of the sagas? To what degree and in what way did new ideals of love find fertile ground in clerical and secular environments in Iceland? In the kings' sagas and early skalds' sagas (that is, the sagas up to the 1230s), time and again we find that the hero is involved in a love story. The woman's love for the man is especially idealized which, in line with heroic ideas of love, could both give the hero honour and create inequality between men, provoking conflicts. At the same time, heroes associated with love were in danger of being seen as weak. How did saga writers approach these problems?

In one of the first sagas written about a Norwegian king, Óláfr Tryggvason, the monk Oddr explained his purpose as being 'to honour our king with human praise, whom God has exalted with heavenly praise'.⁴⁵ Oddr commends both Óláfr's contribution to the introduction of Christianity and his knightly conduct.⁴⁶ After growing up in Holmgarðr, Óláfr joins King Valdemar's *hirð*, and it soon becomes clear that he has natural talent for being trained in knightly skills. He shows courage in battle and a flair for strategy, and he teaches his men to conduct themselves in a knightly fashion, Oddr writes. However, Oddr is not radical enough to refrain from praising Óláfr's blood vengeance for his foster-father. New common European ideals are only vaguely mentioned and conform to Old Norse norms.⁴⁷

A traditional form of human praise that Oddr used adeptly was the approving gaze of women. He puts many women in Óláfr's life, women who can recognize a hero when they see one. Queens throughout Northern Europe admire King Óláfr, despite the fact that he often travels in disguise.⁴⁸ Both Queen Geira of Vinðland and Queen Gyða in England had been widows for some time and would have been more than happy to have a husband like Óláfr to defend their realms. In many respects, these episodes resemble *Orkneyinga saga*'s account of Rognvaldr Kali's encounter with Ermengard in Narbonne, and it is not impossible to imagine that Oddr was inspired by it in portraying his own hero. The hero comes to a *hirð* presided over by a woman, is offered marriage, but is not very active himself in pursuing a relationship until the woman singles him out. No guardian (*giptingarmaðr*) comes between her

⁴⁵ ÓTO, p. 2: 'oc samir oss þat at vegsama konung varn með mannligum lofom er guð hefir upp með himneskum lofum'.

⁴⁶ Lars Lönnroth, 'Studier i Olaf Tryggvasons saga', *Sammlaren* (1963), 54–94, see esp. ÓTO, pp. 28–29.

⁴⁷ ÓTO, p. 26; see also Johan Anton Rønneberg Rygg, 'Fra spontanitet og voldsglede til selvkontroll og avsky for vold? En mentalitetshistorisk studie i voldsforståelse på det førstatalige Island og i det statlige Norge, ca. 1180–1300' (unpublished master's thesis, University of Oslo, 1997), pp. 169, 177.

⁴⁸ Especially evident in ÓTO, pp. 32–34, 56–60.

and the hero; on the contrary, the queen's counsellors readily see that such a noble man is needed to defend the kingdom. The main difference is that Oddr portrays the two queens Óláfr meets as widows, and that Óláfr actually marries them.

However, there are instances in Oddr's saga when Óláfr comes into conflict with a guardian. An example is the instigation of the battle of Svǫldr. Oddr relates that the Danish king, Sveinn tjúguskegg, has contracted a marriage for his sister Þyri to Búrizleifr, King of Vinðland. Þyri does not want to marry the heathen king and instead flees to Óláfr Tryggvason, who has now become King of Norway. They marry without Sveinn's permission. Sveinn is furious, especially when his wife, Sigríðr stórráði — who had been rejected by Óláfr earlier — eggs him on to avenge himself on Óláfr. This eventually leads to Óláfr's fall at Svǫldr. In this instance, the challenge to Sveinn is justified by the fact that Búrizleifr is a heathen. Sveinn shows himself as a bad guardian who could conceive of marrying the pious Þyri to such a king. Óláfr, in contrast, is a good Christian king who acts without any other motive than to save the innocent Þyri.⁴⁹

Similar conflicts with *giptingarmenn* can be found in the other kings' sagas. A typical example is Snorri's account of when Óláfr Haraldsson is denied the hand of the Swedish princess Ingigerðr. Relations between the Norwegian king and King Óláfr scenski have long been strained, and Ingigerðr is married instead to Jarizleifr in Holmgarðr (Yaroslav the Wise, 1019–54). Óláfr scenski sends his illegitimate daughter Ástriðr to Norway to become Óláfr Haraldsson's queen. What makes Snorri's version special is how he emphasizes the love and recognition the two princesses give to the Norwegian king despite their father's contempt for him. Ingigerðr's and Ástriðr's eagerness to marry Óláfr Haraldsson neutralizes the insult it must have been in Snorri's eyes for the Swedish king to deny the holy Óláfr a legitimate bride. The tension between Óláfr scenski's evaluation of Óláfr Haraldsson and that of his daughters is particularly evident in Snorri's *Heimskringla*. Ingigerðr is sought out by Óláfr Haraldsson's messenger, and after what she hears about the Norwegian king, she becomes very positive about the marriage: 'if Óláfr is as you say he is in all

⁴⁹ Þyri does more goading in other kings' sagas; see Anne Heinrichs, 'Annat er vart eðli: The Type of the Prepatriarchal Woman in Old Norse Literature', in *Structure and Meaning in Old Norse Literature: New Approaches to Textual Analysis and Literary Criticism*, ed. by John Lindow, Lars Lönnroth, and Gerd Wolfgang Weber, The Viking Collection, 3 (Odense: Odense University Press, 1986), pp. 110–40; Annette Kruhøffer, 'Slaget ved Svold – og kvinderne bak', in *Sagas and the Norwegian Experience*, ed. by Jan Ragnar Hagland, 10th International Saga Conference (Trondheim: NTNU, Senter for middelalderstudier, 1997), pp. 381–91. On the other hand, Adam of Bremen writes in the 1070s that Óláfr Tryggvason relied on sorcery and many thought he was an apostate. Adam argued that it was Óláfr who initiated the war against Sveinn. Þyri shared the blame; as a punishment she deservedly died a pitiful death, according to Adam of Bremen, *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*, ed. by Bernhard Schmeidler, *Scriptores rerum Germanicum*, 2 (Hannover: Hahn, 1917), book II, chs 36, 40. Saxo considered Óláfr Tryggvason as a rude and haughty king who disgraced Sigríðr in the first place, and hence defends Sveinn's attack on him; to Saxo Óláfr was, after all, just a barbarian.

respects, I think I could not wish for a husband to be otherwise, at least if you have not flattered him too much in many ways'.⁵⁰ This puts Óláfr *sænski* in a bad light while justifying the actions of Óláfr, Ingigerðr, and Ástriðr.

The heroic tradition of love was useful for Oddr and Snorri when they sought to honour Óláfr Tryggvason and Óláfr Haraldsson with human praise. Heroic conceptions about the love of an independent woman were used in a new context. Snorri made Óláfr Haraldsson's relationship with the Swedish princesses into a battle between two 'households', but by emphasizing the two women's love for Óláfr Haraldsson, Óláfr comes out a hero even though the Swedish king gives his daughter to Jarizleifr. Snorri and Oddr adapted the heroicizing of women's love in heroic poetry by setting out new criteria for what women looked for in a man. Fearlessness was not enough; chivalrous behaviour and the Christian dimension had become important values for women in the sagas. That is why there is no discussion of a more individualized brand of love in these sagas. Love gained significance initially in the juxtaposition of the 'inner' and 'outer' spheres, which are magnified here from household dimensions to both a national (Norwegian/Swedish) and a religious (Þyri/Búrizleifr/Óláfr Tryggvason) level.

The same principle of idealizing a love relationship outside one's own social space occurs in a few of the *skalds'* sagas. Egill Skallagrímsson, Kormákr Ögmundarson, and Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld all win honour by winning women's love. But women's love is only unproblematic in an unequivocally positive sense when the events take place *outside* Iceland. An example is Egill Skallagrímsson's visit to an earl on the coast of Halland. They draw lots for drinking partners, and he gets to drink with the

⁵⁰ Hkr:Ósh ch. 72, 'ef Óláfr er svá at sér gorr um alla hluti sem þú segir frá honum, þá mynda ek eigi kunna óskja minn mann á annan veg, ef eigi er þat, at þér mynið heldr hóli gilt hafa í marga staði'. See also chs 89 and 94. The marriage negotiations concerning the daughters of the Swedish king were clearly an important topic for Snorri; they occupy nearly a third of his large saga about Óláfr Haraldsson, while earlier sources (HN ch. 18 and TM ch. 64; Fsk, ch. 30; Ágr ch. 25) are far less informative; see also Sverre Bagge, *Society and Politics in Snorri Sturluson's Heimskringla* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 102–03; Judith Jesch, 'In Praise of Ástriðr Óláfsdóttir', *Saga-Book*, 24 (1994), 1–18 (p. 16). *Morkin-skinna* (1220s) only begins after the death of Óláfr Haraldsson, but says that Ingigerðr remained a friend to Óláfr even after her marriage to Jarizleifr. She even suggests Norway supersedes Garðaríki in every matter thanks to the glory of Óláfr. This leads Jarizleifr to become furious with Ingigerðr. He hits her because of the love she shows to the Norwegian king (Msk, pp. 1–3). Ingigerðr later became a nun and changed her name to Anna and eventually was revered as a saint. We find a related story of a queen's love for a Norwegian king also in Snorri's depiction of Haraldr harðráði's stay in Byzantium (Hkr:Hsh chs 13–15). Haraldr asks for the hand of Maria, the niece of Empress Zoë. Zoë turns his proposal down because she wants him herself. On Haraldr harðráði and Zoë in Norse contrasted to Byzantine sources, see Lars Lönnroth, 'The Man-Eating Mama of Miklagard: Empress Zoë in Old Norse Saga Tradition', in *Kairos: Studies in Art History and Literature in Honour of Professor Gunilla Åkerström-Hougen*, ed. by Elisabeth Piltz and Paul Åström (Jonsered: P. Åström, 1998), pp. 37–49.

earl's daughter all evening at the feast. He sits in her place while she mingles with the other men and enjoys herself. Egill pays little attention. When it comes time for them to sit down and drink, she is disappointed in her drinking partner and tells him to get up and move. She even speaks a verse calling Egill a callow youth and a coward! Then Egill forces her to sit down next to him and speaks some verses about his battles. Of course he had stained his sword with blood! Egill is then deemed worthy; the earl's daughter drinks happily with him the rest of the evening.⁵¹

Preben Meulengracht Sørensen has pointed out that Norway functioned as an extension of the social space for Icelanders. Norway's *hirð* milieu represented a social space where skalds could win honour without tipping the social balance.⁵² Just as the Norwegian kings, Icelandic skalds could win fame and prestige through a woman's love *overseas*.

But what about men's love? Was it also beginning to take a larger and more significant place in the Icelander's world of ideas? The earliest sign that men's love poetry was becoming more accepted in Iceland is the new role *mansǫngr* has in the sagas. We saw in the previous chapter that Egill Skallagrímsson may have composed *mansǫngr* without wishing to challenge anyone. By making clear Egill's 'honourable' intentions regarding Ásgerðr, the episode almost serves as a commentary on the violent consequences *mansǫngr* could have in society. Egill's intentions are differentiated from unintended consequences in a way that *Grágás* and many of the saga characters do not take into account. The writer of *Egils saga* actually chooses to start with a love story. The skald Ólvir hnúfa loves Sólveig the fair, a Norwegian earl's daughter. Because the earl does not consider Ólvir important enough, he rejects Ólvir's suit. Love-sorrow so overwhelms him that he can no longer bring himself to go on Viking expeditions. He expresses his longing for Sólveig in a *mansǫngr*. True to tradition, Sólveig's brothers try to kill him for such unheard-of impudence, but Ólvir flees to Haraldr hárfagri's *hirð*. There, he is received well in all respects. While the woman's family acted in accordance with a traditional view of love poetry, Haraldr hárfagri did not see the *mansǫngr* or Ólvir's love as any threat to society or his masculine identity. The writer of *Egils saga* must be given credit for a clear desire to break with the traditional discourse of honour.⁵³

⁵¹ Egs ch. 48. Similar drinking habits between men and women are found in Egs ch. 7; Krm ch. 25; Hkr:Ys ch. 37. These episodes are all set outside of Iceland and in heathen times; the exception is Rognvaldr, who enjoyed himself with Ermengard. A related story is found in Hall ch. 8, where Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld is loved by a heathen Swedish noblewoman, and marries her. She is eventually converted. Again this is a story of the traveller's granting of love in foreign countries, while the love affair at home continues to cause social breakdowns.

⁵² Meulengracht Sørensen, *Fortælling*, p. 224.

⁵³ Egs chs 2–4. A similar depiction of a king's comforting role to a skald suffering from love is found in the short *Ívars þáttur Ingimundarsonar*, incorporated into *Morkinskinna* (Msk, pp. 354–56 (ch. 65)). Ívarr Ingimundsson, the Icelandic court skald of King Eysteinn Magnússon (1103–23), suffers from love for a woman back home because his own brother had married

Egils saga often uses Egill's skaldic skills and his violent temper to highlight the psychological conflicts that arose in situations where emotions are supposed to be suppressed, but which nevertheless come to the surface through poetry. In particular, the poems *Hofuðlausn* (a forced tribute to his enemy Eiríkr blóðøx), *Sonatorrek* (composed in memory of his son who drowned and therefore could not be avenged), and the *mansöngur* about a woman he loves but whose name he must conceal show the inner struggle which dominates Egill's feelings and his need to find expression for them. Egill is portrayed as a victim of traditional emotional norms, and the saga supports him in his struggle. Love is seen first and foremost as a psychological reaction, without its necessarily needing to lead to social consequences or degrade his masculine identity.

The saga makes this clear by contrasting Ólvir's and Egill's *mansöngur* to more negative methods of expressing love. Early in the saga we learn of the chieftain Björgólfr's lust for Hildiríðr. Björgólfr uses his power over Hildiríðr's family to get her, which results in an antisocial marriage and fatal consequences for society (in contrast to Egill's marriage to Ásgerðr).⁵⁴ The boy who makes *manrúnar* later in the saga to win the love of a girl is also portrayed negatively. The carving of these runes can be interpreted as an attempt to force the girl to love him, whereas Egill's *mansöngur* is a manifestation of the man's inner feelings. However, that is not to say that love is idealized in the saga as it was by the troubadours. The saga never mentions Ólvir's

her. This is an ugly twist of the theme of the love triangle that makes it impossible for Ívarr to take revenge or even challenge his brother's position. The King helps Ívarr overcome his sorrow by making conversation about her every day. The plan succeeds and Ívarr regains his good mood. The story is first and foremost about King Eysteinn's strong friendship with his retainers; cf. Joseph Harris, 'Theme and Genre in Some Íslendinga þáttir', *Scandinavian Studies*, 48 (1976), 1–28 (p. 6); Bjarni Einarsson, *To skjaldesagaer*, pp. 35–37; Ármann Jakobsson, 'King and Subject in Morkinskinna', *Skandinavistik*, 28 (1998), 101–17. Still, it might reflect the contemporary medical view of love as an illness; cf. Mary Wack, *Lovesickness in the Middle Ages: The 'Viaticum' and its Commentators* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), esp. pp. 1–24; cf. Anne Heinrichs, 'Die Lebenskranke Freyr, euhemeristisch entmythisiert', *alvíssmál*, 7 (1997), 3–36. However, the cure to lovesickness would often simply be intercourse, a solution that was clearly rejected in the *þáttur* as the King's offering of the company of other women is said not to have helped. The *þáttur* has been regarded as interpolated into *Morkinskinna* late in the thirteenth century, but several recent studies have suggested that most of the many *þættir* of the saga were an integral part of the original version; see Ármann Jakobsson, *Staður i nýjum heimi: konungasagan Morkinskinna* (Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 2002); Theodore M. Andersson and Kari Ellen Gade, 'Introduction', in *Morkinskinna: The Earliest Icelandic Chronicle of the Norwegian Kings (1030–1157)*, trans. by Theodore M. Andersson and Kari Ellen Gade, *Islandica*, 51 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), pp. 23–24, 72–83.

⁵⁴ Cf. Thomas Bredsdorff, *Kaos og kærlighed: En studie i islændingesagaers livsbillede*, 2nd edn (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1995), pp. 25–39. Björgólfr's relationship to Hildiríðr later led to a struggle for the inheritance between the sons of Hildiríðr and Þórólfr, a conflict that causes much of the strife in the first part of the saga.

love for Sólveig after he comes to Haraldr hárfagri's *hirð*. The male fellowship of the *hirð* compensates for a love relationship with the woman. Egill's love for Ásgerðr only creates a temporary tension, and being friends with Arinbjörn is something Egill values even more highly than winning Ásgerðr with his power over words.

Another element in the new attitude towards *mansöngur* is how praise poetry to women is portrayed, as the short tale of the skald Óttarr svarti demonstrates. In this episode, Óttarr svarti composes a *mansöngur* in *drápa* form to King Óláfr Haraldsson's wife Ástriðr Óláfsdóttir, while she is still unmarried and living in Sweden. King Óláfr becomes a little worked up, to say the least, when he hears of this. The story of the meeting between Óláfr and Óttarr survives in several different versions. In *The Legendary Saga of St Óláfr* from around 1200, Óttarr's *drápa* is portrayed in a somewhat doubtful light. The *Legendary Saga* relates that King Óláfr is furious with Óttarr about the poem. Óttarr's friend Sigvatr Þórðarson tries to help him. Sigvatr thinks his wording is over the top and encourages Óttarr to change a few stanzas and omit others. Óttarr is later called before the King and recites the *drápa*, but despite the changes, Óláfr becomes very angry. Óttarr goes straight into reciting a praise poem to the King which is so good that the King gives him his head in return.⁵⁵

Ástriðr here has a relatively marginal role; she is the passive object about which Óttarr composes poetry. The conflict is played out primarily between Óttarr and Óláfr. In the saga by Styrmir fróði about St Óláfr from around 1220, Ástriðr's role and the content of the *mansöngur* are presented quite differently. As in earlier versions of the story, the King is pacified after Óttarr composes a poem about him, and gives him his head in payment. But in Styrmir's version, Queen Ástriðr also gives the skald a payment in the form of a valuable ring. Óttarr is almost treated as the Queen's own *hirðmann* (or troubadour?). Óláfr does not understand why and becomes angry, but Ástriðr replies calmly, 'Do not be upset by this, my lord, if I reward praise of myself as you do for yourself.'⁵⁶ The King is obliged to relent, but makes it clear that he does not want to hear of any friendship between Ástriðr and Óttarr thereafter. Whether Óttarr and Ástriðr really had a relationship back in Sweden is irrelevant in this context. However, we cannot be sure whether the *drápa* ever really existed. The most significant aspect of Styrmir's version of the tale is that the King's loss of honour and recovery are achieved without deep discord. That Ástriðr regarded the *drápa* as a praise poem to herself and not as an insult to her husband's honour is an important step in the development of the Norse understanding of love poetry.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Leg, pp. 56–57.

⁵⁶ SÓH, p. 703: 'Eigi munu þier kunna mik um þeta herra, þo ath ek vilia launa mitt lof sem þu þitt.'

⁵⁷ The versions of the *þáttr* are printed in SÓH, pp. 702–06. Ástriðr is also depicted favourably elsewhere by Styrmir, especially when she offers herself as a wife to King Óláfr in order to settle the conflict between him and her father. Ástriðr is also praised in her lifetime by the skald Sigvatr Þórðarson in three stanzas, first of all for her good advice and her conduct when her stepson Magnús Ólafsson is made king; cf. Jesch, 'In Praise'. Another example of

The beginning of the thirteenth century is characterized by a stronger distinction between *mansöngr* on the one hand and slanderous verse on the other. In *Sneglu-Halla þáttr*, first of all, we find strong sexual insults.⁵⁸ On one occasion, Haraldr harðráði prevails upon Sneglu-Halli to compose a coarse poem about Þóra Þórbergsdóttir, his queen, to see how she takes it. The Queen wants Sneglu-Halli to be put to death for the mocking verses about her, while Haraldr thinks it is rather fun to have Halli around. The roles of the skald, king, and queen are turned upside down in relation to Óttarr svarti and his *mansöngr*. The story deals in a general way with the conflict between the new courtly ideals and the old norms of self-assertion personified in the skalds Þjóðólfr, described as courtly and well-bred, and the sharp and impertinent Sneglu-Halli. The story's humorous twist sees Halli, rather than Þjóðólfr, advance in the *hirð*. The point here is that Sneglu-Halli's poetry is considered a contrast to *mansöngr*, and as such contributes to disarming the genre.⁵⁹

Nevertheless, the dividing line between the skald's intention and the *giptingar-maðr*'s or husband's understanding, and between 'good' and 'bad' poems to women, had not solved the problem of the social significance of love poetry when the skalds were in Iceland. What was permissible at a feast in Halland or Narbonne was more difficult to pull off at home in Iceland. The story of *Kormáks saga* has as much to do with the conflicts between Kormákr and Steingerðr's father and her two successive husbands as with his relationship with Steingerðr herself. Only in the saga's portrayal of Kormákr's first encounter with Steingerðr are the lovers seen in a 'courtly' setting. Kormákr manages to recite a full ten 'clean' stanzas of love poetry on this occasion. They amuse themselves together playing chess and combing hair. But in this scene as well, Steingerðr peeks at Kormákr 'under the eyes of Hagbarðr', a hint of the gathering tragedy.⁶⁰ When Kormákr and Steingerðr return to social reality,

mansöngr being conceived as a praise poem to women is found in Fóst ch. 11. Þormóðr composes love lyrics to Kolbrún, but later uses these to praise another woman. Kolbrún does not approve and blinds Þormóðr by sorcery. He has to publicly admit that the stanzas were made for her; only then does he get his sight back. On the relations between men and women in this saga, see Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, 'On Humour, Heroes, Morality, and Anatomy in Fóstbræðra saga', in *Twenty-Eight Papers Presented to Hans Bekker-Nielsen on the Occasion of his Sixtieth Birthday 28 April 1993* (Odense: Odense University Press, 1993), pp. 395–418 (pp. 397–401).

⁵⁸ Msk, pp. 234–47 (ch. 43); Flat, I, 415–28.

⁵⁹ In Fóst ch. 3 two views on men's love are represented in the foster-brothers Þorgeirr and Þormóðr. Þorgeirr thinks it is a shame for a brave and strong man to 'crawl' before a woman. Þormóðr, on the other hand, enjoys making poetry to women. According to the saga, women clearly approve of Þormóðr's verses far more than the heroic-ascetic attitude of Þorgeirr; see Meulengracht Sørensen, 'On Humour', pp. 402–07.

⁶⁰ The saga author might have implied that 'the eyes of Hagbarðr' were somehow part of the room's décor, perhaps as a motif on a tapestry. The tragic love story of Hagbarðr and Signý is only preserved by Saxo. Hagbarðr was hanged by Signý's father because he had

their idyll is shattered. Kormákr fights with Steingerðr's brothers, he does not show up at the wedding, and Steingerðr becomes weary of him. She wants neither to make him shirts nor to accept gifts or praise verses from him. According to sources of the early thirteenth century, it was only in a sphere removed from the discourse of honour and social strategies and dilemmas in Iceland that there could be room for happy love affairs and innocent *mansöngur*.

Snorri and Styrmir on Men's Love

At the beginning of the thirteenth century, it was still problematic to portray men as lovers. The heroic aspect of women's love was acceptable. But what about when saga writers portrayed heroes and kings in love? What function could an emotion that made men weak have in the sagas? We will focus on two saga writers who represent two different but related literary schools in Iceland in the 1220s. The two writers are Snorri Sturluson, a chieftain and law-speaker who maintained close contacts with the Norwegian aristocracy, and Styrmir Kárason inn fróði, who was also a law-speaker and, at one point, a close friend of Snorri's. Snorri (c. 1179–1241) was killed in his own cellar as a result of his role in the power struggles in Iceland, while Styrmir (c. 1170–1245) met his end peacefully as a monk. Did their different paths in life shape their images of men's love?

We have seen that Snorri used heroic conceptions of love in his portrait of Óláfr Haraldsson in *Heimskringla*. Typical of this king's saga is that it puts far less emphasis on Óláfr's feelings for Ingigerðr than on Ingigerðr's love for him. When he learns that the Swedish king does not want to give Ingigerðr to him, he is furious.⁶¹ Nevertheless, his anger is more due to the Swedish king's going back on his word than his own feelings of love-sorrow. Instead, he marries her sister Ástriðr and puts Ingigerðr completely out of his mind.

But in another context, Snorri shows that a man could have a strong love for a woman. In Snorri's *Edda*, he retells the myth of Freyr's desire for Gerðr. Freyr cannot eat, talk, or sleep after he sees Gerðr for the first time. Here, Snorri is concerned to underline a close connection between sorrow and love's power over men's minds, a power that builds on the conception that a man becomes weak by loving a woman. Love-sorrow is not idealized in and of itself, but looks for resolution through the conquest of the (unwilling) woman.⁶² The story of Freyr's love is

earlier killed her brothers. Signý set fire to her house at the moment she thought Hagbarðr had been executed (Saxo).

⁶¹ Hkr:Ósh ch. 90.

⁶² SnE, p. 56; see also Sävborg, *Sorg och elegi*, pp. 214–15; Paul Bibire, 'Freyr and Gerðr: The Story and its Myths', in *Sagnaskemmtun: Studies in Honour of Hermann Pálsson*, ed. by Rudolf Simek, Jónas Kristjánsson, and Hans Bekker-Nielsen, ScriptOralia, 51 (Vienna: Böhlau, 1986), pp. 19–40 (p. 35).

reminiscent of what happens with Haraldr hárfagri when he meets Snæfriðr. Snorri says that Haraldr 'loved her so madly that he left everything, the kingdom and all that he should attend to there'.⁶³ Even after her death, he sits passively by her body and neglects his royal duties. The people worry about his madness for many years. Not until the body is moved is the true character of Snæfriðr revealed: snakes and frogs spring from her body. Haraldr regains his strength and takes pleasure in his men, and they in him. The story is found in most of the kings' sagas and may have functioned as a moral lesson for kings not to set women, who were easily accessible to kings, higher than their royal duties.⁶⁴

This problem is also found in courtly romances from Snorri's time. Chrétien de Troyes's romance *Erec et Enide* tells of a knight who loves his wife so much that he spends more time in bed than he does in his armour. He then learns that he has become the subject of general gossip, so he goes out into the world with Enide to test his own manhood and Enide's fidelity. Both survive the journey and continue their married life. For Haraldr, though, it is best to forget the woman and bury her. In the Norse tradition, a woman who could sharpen a man's actions was valued more highly than a woman who weakened his skills as a warrior. Snorri is concerned with men's love for women and acknowledges its great power, but he does not idealize the male lover at the expense of the exultant warrior.

Snorri was probably well acquainted with European court ideals and love poetry through his visit to Norway. If it was really he who wrote *Egils saga*, it may mean that he wanted to empty *mansöng* of their power to cause conflict. It is not an entirely unreasonable thought; Snorri seems never to have been particularly enthusiastic about unnecessary feuding. He belonged to a new generation of skalds who were more interested in poetic language and history than entering into the role of a 'wormtongue'. Snorri even composed a poem that *may* have resembled a *mansöng*. His nephew Sturla Þórðarson tells that he composed the poem *Andvaka* ('Sleeplessness', 'Wakefulness') at the behest of Hákon galinn to Hákon's wife, Kristín Nikoláasdóttir. Unfortunately, the poem is now lost, but the name of the poem gives us an idea of its content.⁶⁵ It is not unrealistic to suppose that Snorri has assumed the

⁶³ Hkr:Hshá ch. 25: 'Ok unni svá með ærslum, at ríki sitt ok allt þat, er honum byrjaði, þá fyrir lét hann.'

⁶⁴ Jan de Vries, 'Het Snjófriðlied von Harald Schoonhaar', in *De Libris: Bibliofile Breve til Ejnar Munksgaard* (Copenhagen: Pedersens boktrykkeri, 1940), pp. 165–72. The story of Haraldr hárfagri and Snæfriðr might have been a local version of a sacred marriage: establishing a ruling line between a king and a woman from the outside. The offspring from their union was Rognvaldr réttillbeini, a local king at Hadeland in eastern Norway; see Ágr ch. 2; and Yngvar Nielsen, 'Den gamle hadeland-ringerikske kongæt og Snæfridsagnet', in *Sproglige og historiske afhandlinger viede Sophus Bugges minde* (Kristiania: Aschehoug, 1908), pp. 145–56; Gro Steinsland, *Det hellige bryllup og norrøn kongeideologi* (Oslo: Solum, 1991), pp. 209–11.

⁶⁵ Sts, I, 271. Kålund suggested that the name was derived from the effort Snorri had making it: Kristian Kålund, *Sturlunga saga i dansk oversættelse* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal,

role of the vicarious poet and attempted to put Hákon's feelings for Kristín into words. Snorri may have been fascinated by the job; as a skald, he was surely well acquainted with skaldic verse about women who give men sleepless nights. An example is Magnús berfættr's verse complaining of his sleeplessness because of Maktildr.⁶⁶ A possible interpretation would be that Snorri's poem presented Hákon's inability to sleep for love of Kristín, whereby Snorri possibly described her as a woman who caused insomnia in men by virtue of her beauty. This interpretation fits well with stories in which *mansöngur* is taken as a praise of the woman herself. In any case, Kristín liked the poem; she gave Snorri good gifts when he came for a visit in 1217. If this interpretation is correct, it indicates that love poetry was increasingly sought after in the milieu to which Hákon galinn and the Swedish Kristín belonged, and that the Icelanders' skill in composing love poetry in the vernacular was in demand.⁶⁷ But we have seen that the newfangled ideals of love did not take such a firm grip on Snorri himself.

From secular prose writing, represented by Snorri, we now turn our attention to the ecclesiastical prose-writing milieu. The ideas surrounding men's love also began to change in the ecclesiastical milieu in Iceland at the end of the twelfth century, primarily in the direction of an interpretation of men's fleshly desires as sinful and always reprehensible, but also in terms of social distinction.

The reform movement hit Iceland hard during the episcopacy of Þorlákr Þórhallsson (1178–93) of Skálholt. The most prominent document of his view of male desire is his penitential. It consists of twenty-five sections, some specifically dealing with male sexual transgressions.⁶⁸ Sections 2–17 deal with penances that priests could

1904), I, 298 n. 2. Koht thought that Snorri was alluding to the battle lure of St Óláfr, also named *Andvaka*. Both Hákon galinn as well as his opponents sought to have control over this lure; see Halvdan Koht, 'Snorre Sturlason', in *Norsk Biografisk Leksikon*, vol. XIV (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1962), pp. 107–20 (p. 111). If that is the case, the poem was probably of Hákon's feats as a military leader. Bjarni Einarsson however, gave at least some reasons why this could have been a love poem; see Bjarni Einarsson, 'Andvaka', in *Afmælisrit Jóns Helgasonar*, ed. by Jakob Benediktsson and others, pp. 27–33.

⁶⁶ This Maktilde may be Matilda of Scotland; see above, chapter 5.

⁶⁷ One could also mention the short poems by Einarr Skúlason, court poet and priest in Norway at the middle of the twelfth century. One is about his love for a certain Jóreiðr, wife of Máni; the other claims that his sorrows disappear on the 'white arm of Sólborg' (TGT, 71 (ch. 11)). Einarr is best known for the religious poem *Geisli* from 1153. *Morkinskinna* also tells us that Einarr made a poem about a certain Ragnhildr, owner of a magnificent ship, and also about the nuns of the monastery at Bakki where he claims he was well received. At the same time, another Icelandic skald at the Norwegian court, Hallar-Steinn, made a poem about a woman's beauty that silenced him (TGT, 85 (ch. 13)). Not much is known about Hallar-Steinn, but he is famous for the pious poem *Reksteffa* about Óláfr Tryggvason.

⁶⁸ Sveinbjörn Rafnsson, 'The Penitential of St. Þorlákur in its Icelandic Context', *Bulletin of Medieval Canon Law*, n.s., 15 (1985), 19–30 (p. 26).

impose for transgressions by the laity, moving from the gravest to lesser sins. Sections 20–24 enumerate transgressions for which only the bishop could decide the penance, focusing especially on penances for priests who do not perform their clerical duties well.⁶⁹ The penitential of Þorlákr is remarkable, not only because of its late date (this was after all some 130 years after Peter Damian had launched a critique against these lists of sins), but also because it is one of the strictest in its genre.⁷⁰ Þorlákr's purpose was, according to his introduction, to impose penance for 'capital sins' (*hgfúðsyndir*) (§1). However, it is remarkable that in Þorlákr's penitential it is men who are the subject, and their sins are almost all connected to sexuality.

The first and gravest sin is sexual relations that a man would have with another man or with any four-footed animal.⁷¹ Then follows double adultery (§3), and then single adultery, intercourse on feast days and with woman in childbed, eating meat during fast, major perjury, and abortion (§4). Incestuous relations of various degrees are listed in sections 5–11. Sections 12–13 deal with fornication without impediments (*meinalaust kallað*), that is, between unmarried but unrelated partners. The penance for this was comparably low. No mention is made of whether this kind of intercourse may have involved some kind of disgrace for the woman's family.

⁶⁹ A translation of excerpts of this penitential is found in *Medieval Handbooks of Penance: A Translation of the Principal Libri Poenitentiales and Selections from Related Documents*, ed. by John T. McNeill and Helena M. Gamer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938), pp. 355–58. I use the edition in DI, I, no. 43, pp. 240–44, but with references to chapters in the edition of Sveinbjörn Rafnsson, 'Skriptaboð Þorláks biskups', *Gripla*, 5 (1982), 77–114.

⁷⁰ On the development from penitentials to canon law, see Pierre J. Payer, 'Confession and the Study of Sex in the Middle Ages', in *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, ed. by Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage (New York: Garland, 1996), pp. 3–30; on the harshness of the penitential of Þorlákr, see Sveinbjörn Rafnsson, 'Þorláksskriftir og hjúskapur á 12. og 13. öld', *Saga*, 20 (1982), 114–29 (p. 114). The foreign sources for the penitential of Þorlákr were a compiled version of the seventh-century Irish penitential *Paenitentiale Cummeani*, the penitential of Bartholomew Iscanus, Bishop of Exeter (1161–84), Justinian's *Digestum*, and to a lesser degree also canon law; see Sveinbjörn Rafnsson, 'Skriptaboð', pp. 94–96. Þorlákr's knowledge of Irish and English penitentials as well as Roman law was probably gained through his studies in Paris and Lincoln in the 1150s. Had he studied a decade or two later, however, he would perhaps have revised the Christian law section instead of making something as 'old-fashioned' as a penitential. As we will see, that was the project of his contemporary, the Archbishop of Niðaróss, who was more influenced by the new canon law in the wake of Gratian and others.

⁷¹ §2: 'IX. vetr eða .X. firir hordom þann er karlmenn eigozst uith. eða þann er menn eigo vith ferfætt kuikendi' (Nine or ten years for that carnal sin which two men commit together, and for that which men commit with four-footed beasts). The Norwegian term *blandast við* is replaced with *eigast við* here. In Old Norse laws the words 'sodomy' or 'sodomite' are never mentioned. See also HomIsl, p. 137: 'leiþelego laúnþurfa synþer es sumer men gera. þeir es eigi þyrma kþrlom heldr en konum. eþa misþyrma kycqvendom ferfeóttom' (the disgraceful sins of clandestine lust that some men do; those who do not respect men any more than women, or who misuse four-footed beasts).

Þorlákr instead introduced another kind of social stratification for penitents. He divided the male sexual transgressors in dichotomized pairs; the rich should do more penance than the poor, the holy more than the unholy, the learned more than the unlearned, highly ordained more than lesser ordained, the blessed more than the wretched, the older more than the younger.⁷² Additionally he graded the penance, and thus the degree of pollution a man could incur through lust, by the object through which he satisfied his carnal desire:

Firir þad skal minzst bida. þess er j lostaseme er misgert ath uakanda mannj.⁷³ ef hann saurgaz af blijdlæti uith kono. Meira ef madr saurgaz af hondum sijnum sialfs. Meira ef madr saurgaz af trie borodo.⁷⁴ Mest ef madr saurgaz af annars karlmanz hondum. (§17b)

For that shall be least punished, that which is misdane in lustfulness while awake, if he is polluted by friendliness with a woman. More if a man is polluted by his own hands. More if a man is polluted by drilled wood. Most if a man is polluted by another man's hands.

This is not a distinction between men of different sexual orientations or preferences, only a growing degree of pollution connected to the devices a man sought to satisfy his carnal desire in non-penetrating sexual acts, moving from the relatively acceptable contribution of a woman, via masturbation and wood, to the pollution by another man's hand. Þorlákr neither singles out the passively penetrated or *ragr* man for stigmatization as traditional Norse discourse had done, nor does he apply the new theological definition of sodomy; he follows the traditional penitential pattern of

⁷² §17a: 'Meira skal bida æ uallt firir jafna synd audgum en aumum. meira heilum en uanheilum. meira lærdum en oolærdum. meira meir uijgdum en midr uijgdum. meira sælum en ueslum. meira eldrum en tuitogum. en þeim er yngri ero.'

⁷³ The emphasis on being 'awake' may be an allusion to the question of whether nocturnal emissions during sleep were aspects of sin; see Dyan Elliott, 'Pollution, Illusion, and Masculine Disarray: Nocturnal Emissions and the Sexuality of the Clergy', in *Constructing Medieval Sexuality*, ed. by Karma Lochrie, Peggy McCracken, and James A. Schultz (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp. 1–23; Conrad Leyser, 'Masculinity in Flux: Nocturnal Emission and the Limits of Celibacy in the Early Middle Ages', in *Masculinity in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Dawn M. Hadley (London: Longman, 1999), pp. 103–20. By omitting that which is done in sleep, Þorlákr does not take the most radical stance in this question.

⁷⁴ This sentence is analogous to Burchard of Worms's *Decretum*, c. 1000–1025: 'ut tu tuum virile membrum in lignum perforatum, aut in aliquod hujusmodi mitteres'. In translation: 'such that you placed your virile member into a hole in a wooden object or into any other kind of thing'. Cited from Seth Lerer, 'Transgressio Studii: Writing and Sexuality in Guibert of Nogent', *Stanford French Review*, 14 (1990), 243–66 (p. 260). As in the penitential of Þorlákr, Burchard regards this as more serious than simple masturbation: twenty versus ten days on bread and water.

according all sexual sins a place on the same scale.⁷⁵ In Norse culture, however, Þorlákr was truly innovative. First of all, he was concerned about sexual acts that never were considered before, especially such acts as masturbation and relations with drilled wood. These had never previously been given social significance, but for Þorlákr they were a means of ‘pollution’. Likewise, the social status of the sexual object is irrelevant to Þorlákr (as long as they are, in the case of female partners, unrelated to the man). It is always the ‘active’ partner who is condemned. In contrast to traditional secular views, Þorlákr is interested in curbing the lustful desire of the man, not in the motivation of social degradation of the object of that desire. Taking the active part in any sexual relations outside marriage disgraced powerful men.⁷⁶ The gravity of the sin was still graded according to social position, as in the secular laws, in that persons of higher position were most heavily punished. By emphasizing the special responsibility of the clerics and aristocracy, Þorlákr may have intended in this penitential to link social distinction to sexual self-control. By focusing on male sexual transgressions, the intention could hence also be to enhance the position of the reformed, chaste clerics.

In the sagas of saints, we also find similar problems connected with the active sexual role of men.⁷⁷ In *Agathu saga*, the conflict is between the chaste Christian heroine and the evil Earl of Sicily, Qvincian.⁷⁸ Under the influence of the devil, he has become obsessed with having the maiden, no matter what the cost. He first sends her to a heathen woman (*blótkona*), Afrodisia, who tries with all her might to turn Agatha’s thoughts from God. But she tells the woman that she is Christ’s handmaiden (*ambátt*), and that she neither can nor will give up her service of him. Qvincian tries to use torture, but Agatha rejoices in her sufferings and dies happy in prison with these words of thanksgiving to Christ: ‘you released me from earthly love, and guarded my flesh from pollution.’⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Mark D. Jordan, *The Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

⁷⁶ In two letters Eysteinn chided the Icelandic aristocracy for the sexual sins that dishonoured them; see DI, I, no. 38, pp. 221–22 (1173); DI, I, no. 54, pp. 262–63 (c. 1180). There are no corresponding letters by Eysteinn on the sexual misbehaviour of the Norwegian aristocracy, although both Erlingr skakki and Magnús Erlingsson may have been open to the charge. A letter on robbery of women found in an Icelandic manuscript and attributed to Eysteinn may have been directed to the Norwegian aristocracy and written by Archbishop Eiríkr Ívarsson (1189–1205); see DI, I, no. 41, pp. 234–35, NGL, IV, 98–100, see also G 32; F V 45; F Intro. 10.

⁷⁷ On these sagas, see now Margaret Cormack, ‘Sagas of Saints’, in *Old Icelandic Literature and Society*, ed. by Clunies Ross, 302–25. To her bibliography should be added Else Mundal, ‘Religiøs litteratur som kilde’, in *Skriftlege kjelder til kunnskap om nordisk mellomalder*, ed. by Magnus Rindal, KULTs skriftserie, 38 (Oslo: Noregs forskingsråd, 1995), pp. 61–70.

⁷⁸ HMS, I, 1–14.

⁷⁹ *Agathu saga* ch. 6: ‘Ok tokt af mer veralldar ást, ok vardveittir likama minn fra saurgan.’

Such conflicts as that of Agatha and Qvincian are portrayed in the sagas as a fight between good and evil, the denial and subjugation of the lust of the flesh. Agatha also scorns Qvincian for his worship of Óðinn. She says to Qvincian that he conducts himself like Óðinn, and his wife like Freyja, clearly with a reference to their reputedly unbridled sex lives. Qvincian understands the insult and strikes her. Agatha, however, has the last word: why does Qvincian worship Óðinn and Freyja if he thinks the gods act in a way even he considers contemptible?⁸⁰ For the Norse audience of the saints' sagas, the parallel with *Skírnismál* was surely clear: Skírnir's role as 'mind-turner' was originally seen in a positive light, but in the saints' sagas such seducers were seen as evil. Qvincian does not succeed in turning Agatha's thoughts because she has the help of Christ. While Gerðr cannot live a full life without sexuality, Agatha seeks to do just that. In this legend, Old Norse norms are effectively contrasted with the Church's new norms. As in the mythical poems, the saintly woman's will is of crucial significance to relations between two groups.⁸¹ It is heroic love in a new setting: Christ is seen as the best man whom women have to love.⁸² The extent of such sagas and their adaptation to Norse thought patterns show that these sagas were a weapon in the battle for chastity and indicate that some clerics may have seen women as the target group for these ideals: they had to take responsibility for resisting seducers who sought to entice them with flattery and verses. At the same

⁸⁰ *Agathu saga* ch. 2: 'Heilog mæ'r svaradi: "Ver þu sem gud þinn Odinn, en kona þin slik sem Freyia gydia þin." Quincianus reiddizt ok let beria hnefum i andlit henni ok mællti: "Lat af þu at mæla illt vit mik." Agatha svaradi: "Þu sagdir gud þin vera sannreynd ath guddomi, ver þu ok þa sem Odinn, en kona þin sem Freyia, at þit megit verda hófd i tólu godanna."'

⁸¹ A close parallel is found in *Agnesar saga* (HMS, I, 15–22) where the heroine is asked to renounce her chastity and serve the goddess Gefjón instead. It is noteworthy that in these sagas of saints, the privilege of denying her suitors is strongly emphasized; cf. Birte Carlé, 'Fra slægtssaga til kvindesaga', in *Förändringar i kvinnors villkor under medeltiden*, ed. by Silja Aðalsteinsdóttir and Helgi Þorláksson, Ritsafn Sagnfræðistofnunar, 9 (Reykjavík: Sagnfræðistofnum Háskóla Íslands, 1983), pp. 55–70; Else Mundal, 'Legender, helgenkult og misjonsstrategi i kristningstida', in *Selja – heilag stad i 1000 år*, ed. by Magnus Rindal (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1997), pp. 77–101 (p. 96).

⁸² On the heroic Christ in early Norse skaldic poetry and art, see Henrik von Achen, 'Den tidlige middelalderens krusifikser i Skandinavia: Hvitekrist som en ny og større Odin', in *Møtet mellom hedendom og kristendom i Norge*, ed. by Hans-Emil Lidén (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1995), pp. 269–300; Else Mundal, 'Kristusframstillinga i den tidlege norrøne diktning', in *ibid.*, pp. 255–68; Olav Tveito, *Kvite-Krist: En analyse av Gudsbildet i eldre norrøn skaldediktning* (Oslo: Centre for Medieval Studies, 2002). Some anchoresses were described in a traditional language; the first anchoress in Iceland, Hildir, is described as the 'shield-maiden of God', armed with prayers, faith, hope, and psalms against the demons; cf. Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, 'Legender om hellige kvinner på Island i høymiddelalderen', in *Kirkehistorier: Rapport fra et middelaldersymposium*, ed. by Nanna Damsholt, Grethe Jacobsen, and Niels Henrik Holmqvist-Larsen (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum forlag, 1996), pp. 115–33 (p. 128).

time, the saints' sagas show how men's burning lust threatened society; for a Christian to give in to carnal lust was to open the door to the demonic.

An example of how this new discourse surrounding male desire was used is particularly clear in *Jóns saga helga*. Jón Ögmundarson was bishop in Iceland from 1106 to 1121 and was canonized in 1200. The oldest version of this saga is thought to have been written down not long after he was declared a saint. The saga is not very reliable as a source for Jón's lifetime, but does deal with themes that were current when it was written.⁸³ The author of the saga frequently emphasizes Jón's negative attitude to romantic love. He particularly condemns recitations of love poetry (*mansongskvæði*) between men and women, something the saga says often took place during dancing.⁸⁴ Here we find indications both that *mansongr* had increasingly come to be regarded as having been disarmed and that a Christian moral reason was being given for a ban on such poetry. It is never presented in the saga in the context of the discourse of honour. The perception of *mansongr* as *sinful* must nevertheless have been new for Icelanders at the end of the twelfth century, and for many clerics as well. *Jóns saga* tells of the young student Klængur Þorsteinsson who reads Ovid's books on love. Jón forbids him in the strongest terms against reading this type of poetry, because 'man's weak nature would be inclined enough to love and carnal lust even if he did not goad his mind with impure and sinful poems'.⁸⁵ The saga shows what could happen if a man ran after carnal desire. Sveinn Þorsteinsson is seized by love for a beautiful woman, and he is often drawn to wander about thoughtlessly in the wilderness. The saga explains that the woman is actually a

⁸³ Kuttner notes the anachronism in the saga's account of how Jón sought papal approval of his election because he was married twice: Stephan Kuttner, 'St. Jón of Hólar: Canon Law and Hagiography in Medieval Iceland', *Analecta Cracoviensia*, 7 (1976), 367–75. The saga emphasizes that both his marriages were chaste.

⁸⁴ The account of dance is unique for its time and is often taken as evidence of the growing popularity of continental dancing; see discussion in Bjarni Einarsson, *To skjaldesagaer*, pp. 17–18; Vesteinn Ólason, *The Tradition of Ballads in Iceland: Historical Studies*, Rit, 22 (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, 1982), pp. 35–42; Else Mundal, 'Æ standa mér augo / of eld til Gráfeldar: Ein mansong til Haraldr gráfeldr?', in *Festskrift til Alfred Jakobsen*, ed. by Jan Ragnar Hagland and others (Trondheim: Tapir, 1987), pp. 120–29 (pp. 124–25).

⁸⁵ Jsh (S) ch. 13 (ch. 8): 'Í þeiri bók býr mansongr mikill. En hann bannaði honum at lesa þess konar bœkr ok kallaði þó hverjum manni mundi ærit hofugt at gæta sín við líkamligri munúð ok rangri ást, þó at hann kveykti eigi upp hug sinn til þess með né einum siðum eða þess konar kvæðum.' The A version calls the work *Ovidius epistolarum*, perhaps indicating *Heroides*. This work was known on Iceland, as there are interpolations in *Trójumanna saga* (translated c. 1200). A copy of *Heroides* is also mentioned as the property of Hólar in 1525, but it is impossible to know how old this manuscript was. The B version calls it *Ovidius de arte*, that is, *Ars Amatoria*, but this title may also have been used because it was the best-known work of Ovid; see also Sigurður Pétursson, 'Ovid in Iceland', in *Cultura classica e cultura germanica settentrionale*, ed. by Pietro Janni, Diego Poli, and Carlo Santini (Macerata: Università di Macerata, 1985), pp. 53–63.

demon trying to get Sveinn to forget the Christian life. Jón gets him to pray and go to church again, which enables Sveinn to break free of his delusions.⁸⁶ Thus, the saga portrays man's lust in the context of a battle against demonic powers that threaten Christian society. Jón's chastity keeps him immune to such attacks. Through self-control, he can exercise a masculine authority over both men and demons.

This emphasis on chastity as a part of the bishops' authority was also transferred to secular leaders, and particularly the royal saints. Earl Magnús of the Orkneys (d. 1115) lived in a chaste marriage for ten years, and his *Life* relates that 'when he felt temptation come, he went into cold water and asked God for strength'.⁸⁷ Although Óláfr Haraldsson was hardly canonized because of his chastity, legendary stories of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries attribute to him the same ascetic inclinations as St Magnús.⁸⁸ But the ideal of chastity and rejection of romantic love at the end of the twelfth century followed the Gregorian reforming zeal and the development of mandatory priestly celibacy in Norway and Iceland.⁸⁹ Both St Magnús and St Óláfr may still have been connected more with their deaths as martyrs than the chastity of their lives. But this has also to do with a shift in focus from a general battle for Christianity to the struggle faced by the individual: an inner battle to resist demonic temptations that could put all of society in danger. The battle against lust therefore became an important behavioural characteristic of priests and bishops as well as holy men.

⁸⁶ Jsh ch. 16; see also the B-version ch. 30. A related story is found in Jsh ch 15 (B-version ch. 29), where Jón's own shepherd is among the young men who refuse to attend church services, being more inclined towards games and amusements. Both he and the farm at Hólar then become vulnerable to demonic attack.

⁸⁷ Os ch. 50: 'Ok er hann kenndi freistni á sér, þá fór hann í kalt vatn ok bað sér fulltings af guði'.

⁸⁸ In the late fourteenth-century manuscript *Bergsbók*, there is a short story about his ascetism (SÓH, pp. 809–10). Queen Ástriðr wonders why he disappears at night and where he goes. Her servant discovers Óláfr in cold water. The servant is urged to keep silent about this. In *Morkinskinna* there is a small story about St Óláfr appearing before his son Magnús góði. King Magnús spends the night on the farm of a chieftain and arranges for the chieftain's beautiful daughter to go to bed with him. As Magnús is about to have sex with the maiden, St Óláfr appears in a vision and makes it clear that this act is against his will. Magnús then arranges an honourable marriage for the girl: Msk, pp. 120–24; see Margaret Cormack, 'Fjölknúgri konu skallatu í faðmi sofa: Sex and the Supernatural in Icelandic Saints' Lives', *Skáldskaparmál*, 2 (1992), 221–28. On the greater interest in chaste kings in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, most often explained as a way to show women's sexual insatiability in contrast to the sexual self-control of the reformed clerics, see Dyan Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 113–31; see also Jo Ann McNamara, 'Chaste Marriage and Clerical Celibacy', in *Sexual Practices and the Medieval Church*, ed. by Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage (Buffalo: Protheus, 1982), pp. 22–33.

⁸⁹ Jón Jóhannesson, *Islands historie i mellomalderen: Fristatstida* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1969), pp. 179–81; Erik Gunnes, *Erkebiskop Øystein: Statsmann og kirkebygger* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1996), pp. 164–66.

This clerical discourse on love and desire was in many ways fundamentally new. But there are also sources that indicate the use of the new rhetoric of self-control in traditional settings. The thirteenth-century religious poem *Sólarljóð* gives an account of two close friends that have the misfortune of loving the same woman. They became enchanted by her fair body and eventually kill one another.⁹⁰ The author of the poem laments that love causes only problems, women cause sorrow and tragedy, even though they came pure from God. The poet of *Sólarljóð* clearly believed that the way to free love from the discourse of honour was for people to deny their lust for women in favour of love for God. In Archbishop Eysteinn's *Passio Olavi* from around 1180, a young English priest is living with two brothers. Their beautiful sister talks a great deal with the priest, but only as is fitting and proper. Nevertheless, people begin to talk about the relationship, and when the brothers hear about the rumour they mutilate the priest.⁹¹ Bearing in mind how conversations between a visiting man and a woman of the household were often regarded, the brothers' reaction is not surprising. As mentioned above, priests sometimes had a bad reputation for seducing women. Eysteinn apparently wished to emphasize that pious and chaste clerics should not be understood in a traditional honour context; on the contrary, following the example of the clerics would bring peace to Christian society.

It was in this clerical tradition that Styrmir fróði wrote his saga of Óláfr Haraldsson in the 1220s.⁹² His image of St Óláfr differs from both secular and clerical historiography in that he idealizes the saint-king's love for women. To obtain a more complete picture of how clerics used the concept of love in the period around 1200, I will first attempt to explain why they did so.

Styrmir probably received his education at the monastery of Þingeyrar, a major seat of learning in Iceland around 1200. At Þingeyrar, saga writing and Latin learning blossomed through the efforts of historians like Karl Jónsson, Oddr Snorrason, and Gunnlaugr Leifsson. Styrmir was thus well acquainted with both Norse and European history and literature. He was law-speaker from 1210 to 1214 and edited a version of *Landnámabók*, and he also apparently wrote a now lost version of *Harðar saga*. He was closely associated with Snorri Sturluson for many years,

⁹⁰ *Sólarljóð* sts 10–14, Skj B, I, 635–48. The dating of this poem is a matter of dispute; see Vesteinn Ólason, 'Kristileg trúarkvæði til loka 13. aldar', in *Íslensk bókmenntasaga*, vol. I, ed. by Guðrún Nordal, Sverrir Tómasson, and Vésteinn Ólason (Reykjavík: Mál og Menning, 1992), pp. 481–515 (p. 511).

⁹¹ PO, pp. 28–29. On this story see also Einarr Skúlason, *Geisli*, sts 57–62, Skj B, I, 427–55; Hkr:Hss ch. 25; cf. Gunnes, *Erkebiskop Øystein*, p. 185. Snorri tells a similar story: King Eysteinn often makes conversation with an aristocratic maiden and people start talking about their relationship. She proves her innocence through ordeal, but is later abducted by Sigurðr jórsalafari and becomes his concubine: Hkr:Mss ch. 19 (c. 1115).

⁹² The saga of Styrmir is unfortunately not preserved in its entirety, but 'articles' from it were interpolated into manuscripts of kings' saga in the fourteenth century; see Sigurður Nordal, *Om Olaf den helliges saga: En kritisk undersøkelse* (Copenhagen: Gad, 1914), p. 109.

possibly as his scribe, and Snorri used parts of Styrmir's work as a source for his *Heimskringla*. But at the same time, Styrmir was firmly planted in a clerical milieu. He was an ordained priest, and from 1235 he was prior of the Augustinian monastery on Viðey.⁹³

Styrmir's historical writings are an important reason that five love verses are associated with St Óláfr today. Two of these were addressed to the Swedish princess Ingigerðr, two others to a certain Steinunn, wife of the Norwegian chieftain Þorvaldr galli. The way in which Styrmir uses these poems comes out clearly in the story of Óláfr's relationship with Steinunn. Styrmir says that when King Óláfr is in England to help King Áðalráðr (Æthelred the Unready), he asks some merchants how matters stand with Steinunn, a woman he had loved when he was in Norway. When he hears that Steinunn has been married to Þorvaldr galli, he speaks a verse about how the woman is suffering in her life with Þorvaldr, while Steinunn in turn brings him sorrow. Many years later Óláfr, who has now become king, sails past the farm of Þorvaldr and Steinunn. His men suggest that they dock and pay a visit to Steinunn. The king's reply and Styrmir's comments are well worth citing:

Konungr svarar. voro þeir dagar er mer þotti af krokr litill leidar minar at hitta Steinunni ok en veri þat vilin. En þo skal ecki leggja her til landz þviath mer somer frammar at gera guds vilia ok geyma hans bodorda en ganga fram i ollum hlutum epter raungum girndum mins likama ok holldzins fustum ok uvinarrens aeggian er jafnan stundar med sinum falslegum prettum at fella oss i voru vid skipti. nu ma af þviliku marka hversu Olafr mundi mikit unna sinum skapara ok hversu opt hann mundi briota sin vilia fyrer hans ast. sva ma ok skilia hversu karlmannlega hann mundi strida sinum uvinum ok sigraz a þeim fyllandi þat gudlickt bodord er hann baud sinum lerisvenum sva segiande. estote fortis in bello et cetera. verit styrker i orrosto ok beriz vid fornann eitr orm ok munu þer taka i aumbunn ydars erfidis eilift riki. þvilik guds bodord hafdi Olafr jafnann ser i munni ok þvi van hann optlega fagran sigr sva med andlegum uvinum sem a likamlegum.

The king answered, 'Those days are gone when finding Steinunn would seem a short stray from my way, and still I am inclined to. We shall not, however, go on shore here because it is more fitting for me to do God's will and to keep his commandments than in all ways to follow the wrong desires of my body and the inclinations of my flesh and the devil's goading, who with his false trickery continuously tries to beat us in our struggle.' Of such things we may understand how greatly Óláfr loved his Creator, and how often he overcame his will because of his love. We may also see how manfully he fought against his enemy [the devil] and won, and thus fulfilled the divine commandment he [Christ] gave his disciples, which says: *estote fortis in bello et cetera* — 'remain strong in the war and fight against the old serpent, and you will have eternal honour for your struggle'. Óláfr constantly had such commandments from God in his

⁹³ Sigurður Nordal, *Om Olaf den helliges saga*, pp. 110–11; see also Lars Lönnroth, 'Styrmir's Hand in the Obituary of Viðey', *Mediaeval Scandinavia*, 1 (1968), 85–100.

mouth, and therefore often won a glorious victory both against his spiritual enemies as well as those of the flesh.⁹⁴

That Óláfr Haraldsson had affairs with women outside his marriage to Ástríðr is well known from other kings' sagas; after all, Magnús góði was not exactly born in wedlock. But in contrast to both Snorri (*Heimskringla*) and Archbishop Eysteinn (*Passio Olavi*), Styrmir accentuates both Óláfr's predisposition to love and the problems that attend it. Óláfr's retainers function as representatives of traditional morality when they want him to show his power over Þórvaldr galli, while Styrmir lets the saint-king fight his own inner battle against the devil's temptations to give in to his fleshly desires instead of showing spiritual love for God. Óláfr's verse about Steinunn, which in itself is more reminiscent of a traditional insult to a husband's honour, is used by Styrmir to show that the saint-king could stand against the powerful lust that all men experience. Óláfr must show even stronger love, greater self-control. The manner in which he does this is truly manly (*karlmannlega*); if his love had not been so strong, his accomplishment would not have been much to boast about.⁹⁵

Another important story of Óláfr's love for women attributed to Styrmir fróði is found in *Rauðúlfs þátr*.⁹⁶ The story is of Óláfr Haraldsson's visit to the chieftain Rauðúlfr and his sons. One of the sons, Dagr, has the ability to see people's shortcomings in their eyes. Óláfr is curious and asks what character flaw (*skaplǫstr*) Dagr sees in him. Dagr is reluctant to speak, but eventually replies, 'My lord, it is a fault that many suffer: it is the love of women.'⁹⁷ Óláfr is obliged to agree. The story

⁹⁴ SÓH, p. 696, from Bergsbók. A slightly different version is printed in Flat, III, 237–40 (SÓH, pp. 683, 685–86). There, the woman is called Steinvör and her husband Þorvarðr galli. On this episode and the differences in the two manuscripts, see Else Mundal, 'Heilagmann som sa sex: Lausavise nr. 7 etter Óláfr Haraldsson', *Norskrift*, 42 (1984), 36–57; Russell Poole, 'Some Royal Love-Verses', *Maal og minne*, 1985, 115–31. While Mundal seems to accept the authenticity of Óláfr's poems, a more sceptical stand is taken by Anne Heinrichs, 'Wenn ein König liebeskrank wird: Der Fall Óláfr Haraldsson', in *Die Aktualität der Saga: Festschrift für Hans Schottmann*, ed. by Stig Toftegaard Andersen, *Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde*, 21 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1999), pp. 27–51. In view of the popularity of the theme of historical heroes and kings among Orcadian skalds in the late twelfth century, it is not unlikely that Óláfr's love poems were made at that time.

⁹⁵ The other love stanzas by St Óláfr in the articles of Styrmir were addressed to the Swedish princess Ingigerðr during his exile in Garðaríki in 1028. In the prose context, these love poems are a sign of his strong love for Ingigerðr, but he never challenges the honour of her husband, King Jarisleifr, in any way; SÓH, p. 820; Flat, II, 341. One of these two stanzas is put in a different, probably secondary, prose context in *Tómasskinna* (SÓH, pp. 770–71), cf. Poole, 'Royal Love-Verses'.

⁹⁶ It is suggested that the þátr as preserved was made by Styrmir fróði; see Anthony Faulkes, *Rauðúlfs þátr: A Study*, *Studia Islandica*, 25 (Reykjavík: Bókautgáfa Menningar-sjóðs, 1966), pp. 66–68, 76–77.

⁹⁷ SÓH, p. 671: 'Þan þa herr herra er flesta hendir. Þat er quennanna ast.'

clearly builds on the tradition of Óláfr's many relationships with women, but the idea is used here to portray a saint's battle against his own urges.⁹⁸

The development within clerical saga-writing from a total repudiation of men's love to Styrmir's use of love stories can be put in the context of new trends in the European Church. For St Jón, it was a problem that Ovid's book of the arts of love was read at his school. However, the influence of this work had become unstoppable. In continental Europe, Ovid's works were almost required reading from as early as the end of the eleventh century, though at first this was only true of his mythological poetry. In the twelfth century, his *Ars Amatoria* also became generally known among students. In learned circles, this book was beginning to be seen as an ethical work. Although the book does give advice on how to seduce women, in the light of Ovid's other writings and his life, medieval scholars believed that Ovid's own opinions changed over time. They argued that that was the reason why in later life he wrote *Remedia Amores*, which deals with the negative side of love affairs.⁹⁹ This interpretation of Ovid could make his poetry edifying for love-hungry students; even the great master of love poetry in antiquity believed that it was wrong to be carried away by carnal lust. A similar understanding is to be found in Andreas Capellanus's *De Amore*. God is never offended by good, courtly, and sublimated love, argues one of his lady-loves, but if it is a question of salvation and holiness, love for God must come first.¹⁰⁰

This ideology influenced one of the early Icelandic skald's sagas, *Hallfreðar saga*. The saga tells the 'usual' story of a skald who loves a woman in Iceland, but who loses her to a rival. What is atypical is that the conflict concerning Hallfreðr's love comes to an end towards the end of the saga. His love for Kolfinna is set in opposition to his relationship to the Norwegian king and to God. Earlier, Hallfreðr had met Óláfr Tryggvason in Norway and had been baptized. Back in Iceland, he challenges Kolfinna's husband Gríss in a series of insulting verses. The conflict between them is set to end in a duel when Óláfr appears to Hallfreðr in a dream:

⁹⁸ Snorri used *Rauðúlfs þáttr* to show Óláfr's nature as a politician. In his version, Dagr tells the king about a vice he has, but never does specify it: Hkr:Ósh ch. 164. Jenny Jochens argues that the *þáttr* shows Óláfr Haraldsson as a very lustful man. Snorri then consciously suppresses this unflattering image of St Óláfr, as 'it did not fit into Snorri's depiction of the king's saintly character': Jenny Jochens, 'The Impact of Christianity on Sexuality and Marriage in the Kings' sagas', in *The Sixth International Saga Conference: Workshop Papers* (Copenhagen: Arnamagnæanske Institut, 1985), pp. 151–76. My argument points in the opposite direction; Styrmir had a tendency to construct the saintly king as a naturally passionate man in order to show his spiritual strength. For Snorri, the many affairs Óláfr had with women seem unproblematic; he apparently finds it fitting for a ruler to have several women.

⁹⁹ Warren Ginsberg, 'Ovidius ethicus? Ovid and the Medieval Commentary Tradition', in *Desiring Discourse: The Literature of Love, Ovid through Chaucer*, ed. by James J. Paxson and Cynthia A. Gravlee (Selingsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press, 1998), pp. 62–71.

¹⁰⁰ Andreas Capellanus, *De Amore*, Book I, section H (trans. by Walsh, p. 162).

Þú ætlastk ógott ráð fyrir at berjask við Grís við ill málaefni, en hann hefir svá fyrir mælt ok beðit guð, at så ykkar skyldi sigr fá, er betri málaefni hefiði. Haf ráð mitt, tak með þökkum, at engi hólmanga verði, ok bæt fê [. . .] ok kann vera, at þér þykki þá annat meira vert en hólmanga Gríss, ok hirð eigi, þótt honum þykki sem þú hræðisk. (Hsv ch. 10)

You are inclined to follow bad advice if you want to fight Gríss in a bad case. He has prayed to God that the one of you who had the better case should succeed. Follow my advice and be grateful if there is no single combat, and pay compensation [. . .]. It might be that you will think there will be more important things to do than meet Gríss in single combat. And give no heed if he thinks you are afraid.

With Óláfr's help, love is freed from honour's demand for revenge and killing. The saga shows that it is more important for an individual's honour to admit an inner hierarchy under the king and Christ than to challenge other men for their wives and seek their love.¹⁰¹ There is a movement in the saga: it opens in heathen times, when the skald allows his actions to be controlled by his love for Kolfinna, and it ends in Christian times, when love for Óláfr and Christ are the most important values, emancipating him from the traditional honour discourse. The saga leaves behind the perception that love makes men weak or creates social unbalance in favour of values like forgiveness and reconciliation.

Summary

In this chapter I have tried to show that there were many different ideas about love in the period from 1150 to 1230. Influences from the European continent were not uniform, however; impulses came from different quarters and were often contradictory. Therefore, the solutions to the old problem of love's connection with honour were also different.

Among the secular aristocracy, a more positive attitude to love appears to have prevailed. The story of Rognvaldr's meeting with Ermengard in Narbonne served as a sort of paradigm of an honourable and unproblematic courtship. The poems composed in that situation display traditional skaldic language, but the same situation would surely have been seen as provocative to many men at home in Norway: a queen offering herself and her kingdom to a visiting skald. The revived interest in the ancient art of skaldic poetry and the encounters with more positive estimations of men's love in southern France may have made it easier for *mansöngr* to assume a broader range and a more unproblematic function than it had before.

But neither Rognvaldr nor his skalds found love-longings ennobling in themselves. We also see this attitude in the monk Oddr Snorrason's saga of Óláfr Tryggvason

¹⁰¹ See Marlen Strand Ferrer, 'Middelaldermenneskets emosjonelle atferd: Et uttrykk for en kompleks psykologi', *Historisk tidsskrift*, 80 (2001), 147–72.

and in Snorri's *Heimskringla*. If a man became weak for the sake of a woman, the ideal was for him to get rid of such feelings.

Clerics solved the social problem of love in other ways. The strongest voices in clerical sources at the end of the twelfth century were strongly opposed to lusts of the flesh. Here, men's love was viewed as sinful regardless of the circumstances, and in need of being purged from their thoughts. It is for this reason that Jón forbade any kind of *mansöngr*.

Other clerics saw *mansöngr* as the expression of a struggle in the human soul rather than in the arena of society. For this reason Bjarni Kolbeinsson and Styrmir fróði could present men's love in a positive light and within a Christian framework. Love poetry was seen as a 'manly' expression of saintly self-control. Clerics themselves were in a social role in which they could not take up swords and challenge other men about women. First of all, they were not permitted to bear swords or take part in worldly disputes. Secondly, clerics had another code of honour side by side with the old code: controlling their desires no matter how strong. Obedience to God was a stronger norm for these men than the significance of self-assertion and challenges of honour through control over women.

The various attempts to disentangle love from the discourse of honour indicate that love was a hot topic for Icelanders around 1200. The early sagas of skalds show how *mansöngr* was increasingly seen more as a matter of psychology than as a social problem. It has been stressed that the skald's intention was not always to dishonour the head of household, but rather to express his feelings for the woman. The sagas of the skalds questioned the control that the household structure and the guardian had over his daughter's marriage in a new way. Skalds, women, and guardians are not flat, two-dimensional figures. It was not the purpose of the saga authors to make relationships easy for the saga characters. The social implications of love relationships, and especially the position of being the ambiguous male loving subject, were explored through these sagas, but within the traditional Icelandic household structure and an honour-based society. In this indigenous setting, there was no clear opportunity to escape the ambiguities and social dilemmas connected to love.

Heroic ideals of love were still continuing unabated in Iceland around 1230. Perhaps Þórir jökull's attitude is the most representative of the young man's views on life, death, and love in the first half of the thirteenth century. He recites the following verse before being executed after the battle of Örlýgsstaðir in 1238:

Upp skalt á kjöl klífa,
 köld er sævar drífa;
 kostaðu hug þinn herða,
 hér skaltu lífit verða;
 skafl beygjattu skalli,
 þótt skúr á þik falli;
 ást hafðir þú meýja;
 eitt sinn skal hverr deyja. (Skj B, II, 97; Sts, I, 438)

Up in the boat you shall climb, cold is the wind of the sea. Make your mind hard; here you shall test your life. Do not tremble, even if tribulations befall you; you had love from maidens, eventually all shall die.

For Þórir jökull, courage, an honourable death, and a woman's love were the most important achievements to look back on in the hour of death. We must remember that the social situation after 1220 was approaching civil-war conditions. Chieftains assembled personal armies around themselves. Most of these warriors were not particularly receptive to ideas of saintly chastity nor to sublimated expressions of physical desire. Heroic ideals for these almost professional warrior-retainers may have reduced the significance of the changes in attitude we can detect in the milieu of which learned chieftains like Bjarni, Styrmir, and, to a degree, Snorri were a part. From 1230, young warriors had an alternative to heroic love that was more appealing, for young men within the secular aristocracy as well. This impulse reached its culmination through the Norwegian court, something we will return to in chapter 8.

The Introduction and Early Reception of Consensual Marriage, c. 1160–1230

Most studies of marriage in the Norse Middle Ages have emphasized its social function as a political alliance or as an economic-legal institution. Much less attention has been given to the latitude and values that prospective husbands and wives had prior to marriage. We must remember that the person a man or woman was to marry was hardly written in the stars. Contracting a marriage was a critical transition for both the individual and society. Therefore, the quest for a marriage partner very effectively highlights the relationship between society's rules, collective norms, and the individuals' choices and strategies. Changes to the behaviour patterns of sons, daughters, and parents can give us a valuable insight into how new norms were received. In this and the following chapters, we will look at the consequences of the Church's doctrine of consent. From the mid-1100s, the Church taught that the woman's consent was necessary for a marriage to be valid. Did women actually get a chance to determine whom they would marry? If so, did they take that chance? And if not, what hindered them?

A New Ideology of Marriage Takes Shape

In the European context, historians have perceived a stronger emphasis on the individual's role in relation to parents and kin in arranging a marriage, particularly in the twelfth century. Part of the background of this view is that in that period the Church determined that *consent* was a necessary — and even sufficient — criterion for a valid marriage. Consent is a link in a longer chain of new thought surrounding the role of marriage for the individual and society. Towards the end of the twelfth century, it was an established doctrine that marriage was a union between a man and a woman in the sight of God. It was thus regarded as a sacrament; consent was a holy

act binding the participants together for the rest of their lives. A marriage could be dissolved only if it was not entered into properly; after all, in such a case the couple were never really married in the first place. For theologians and jurists, marriage was an exclusive form of cohabitation which excluded looser connections and forms of polygamy and concubinage.

Today, this emphasis on the individual's consent and the emotional bonds between marriage partners may be interpreted as a precursor to modern marriage between 'free agents'. This interpretation may be less helpful as a window into the twelfth century, however. The Church practically forbade secret marriages — marriages contracted without the knowledge and approval of the Church, family, and local society — and often supported betrothals of children. Property and status transfers remained a very important aspect of marriage into the High and late Middle Ages, perhaps overshadowing the individual's choice even more than before.

To avoid anachronisms in the use of terms like 'consent' and 'marital love', it is instructive to consider the history of these terms. *Consensus* and *maritalis affectio* are found in Roman law but were defined somewhat differently than they were in the twelfth century. For the Romans, *consensus* originally meant the consent of the bride's and bridegroom's *patria potestas* (head of household). In the transition from the late republic to the principate, the definition of *consensus* was broadened to include the consent of both the heads of household and the marriage partners.¹ Nevertheless, this does not mean that consent was the most important element in the late Roman

¹ On consent in Roman law and life, see Susan Treggiari, *Roman Marriage: Iusti Coniuges from the Time of Cicero to the Time of Ulpian* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991); and also James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 32–42; Christopher N. L. Brooke, *The Medieval Idea of Marriage* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), pp. 128–30. On the shift to *sine manu* marriages, see also Suzanne Dixon, 'The Sentimental Ideal of the Roman Family', in *Marriage, Divorce, and Children in Ancient Rome*, ed. by Beryl Rawson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp. 99–113; Richard Saller, 'The Social Dynamics of Consent to Marriage and Sexual Relations: The Evidence of Roman Comedy', in *Consent and Coercion to Sex and Marriage in Ancient and Medieval Societies*, ed. by Angeliki E. Laiou (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1993), pp. 83–104. Paul Veyne argued for a paradigmatic view of late republican Rome. He thought that a stronger Roman state contributed to a more balanced relationship between the sexes; the new aristocracy got the power from the emperor rather than from the family and marital relationships; see Paul Veyne, 'L'amour et la famille sous le Haut-Empire romain', *Annales ESC*, 33 (1978), 35–63. His view influenced both Michel Foucault and Norbert Elias, both very influential in their turn; see Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, vol. III: *The Care of the Self* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), and Norbert Elias, 'The Changing Balance of Power between the Sexes – a Process-Sociological Study: The Example of the Ancient Roman State', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 4 (1987), 287–316. Veyne's thesis has been challenged since the new position of women in literature may still be caused by a masculine rhetoric of self-control; see Kate Cooper, *The Virgin and the Bride: Idealized Womanhood in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

concept of marriage. The *consensus* element was upheld in many traditional rites, including betrothal, the financial settlement, and the wedding feast. Historians have also pointed to the fact that the father's right of veto over his children hindered unwanted marriages. We should also remember that Roman law forbade marriage across social boundaries. The jurists' emphasis on *consensus* could just as easily be used to prevent undesirable romantic relationships being sealed with marriage.

Another characteristic of Roman marriage law was that the bond between husband and wife (*affectio maritalis*) and the outward dignity this bond gave in the eyes of others (*honor matrimonii*) was necessary for a couple to constitute a marriage as opposed to a concubinage relationship or a looser connection. If *affectio maritalis* between the man and woman were absent, they were no longer regarded as married. This marital bond was not a deep emotional bond in the modern sense, but more a will or intention to be married. A concubinage relationship could be marked by mutual feelings, as could a relationship between a single man and woman. But lacking the will to honour one another as man and wife, they were not married. The distinction between concubinage and marriage, therefore, turned on the participants' intentions for the relationship.² If the intention to be married disappeared from the marriage, the result could be divorce. The *consensus* that existed at the beginning of the marriage was not definitive, but had to manifest itself throughout the marriage. The intention and will to be married, therefore, created the marriage, even long after the wedding. Thus, *consensus* was a state of being and not an act in the late antique period. As such, the Roman understanding of 'consent' resembles the heroic consent of the early Norse Middle Ages.

The Roman influence on the Church's concept of marriage was strong throughout the Middle Ages. But towards the High Middle Ages, the content of the terms *consensus* and *maritalis affectio* changed. From the close of the twelfth century until the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, the form and content of marriage were strongly debated and modified by theologians and jurists. The Church used the teachings of

² On *affectio maritalis* in late antiquity and the Middle Ages, see John T. Noonan Jr, 'Marital Affection in the Canonists', *Studia Gratiana*, 12 (1967), 479–509; Michael M. Sheehan, 'Maritalis Affectio Revisited', in *The Olde Daunce: Love, Friendship, Sex, and Marriage in the Medieval World*, ed. by Robert R. Edwards and Stephen Spector (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), pp. 32–43; Erik Kooper, 'Loving the Unequal Equal: Medieval Theologians and Marital Affection', in *ibid.*, pp. 44–56; Frederik Pedersen, '"Maritalis Affectio": Marital Affection and Property in Fourteenth-Century York Cause Papers', in *Women, Marriage, and Family in Medieval Christendom: Essays in Memory of Michael M. Sheehan, C.S.B.*, ed. by Constance M. Rousseau and Joel T. Rosenthal, *Studies in Medieval Culture*, 37 (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1998), pp. 175–209; see also Brooke, *Medieval Idea*, pp. 128–29, 266, and Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society*, pp. 238–40. Most historians have been eager to point out that the 'affection' of *maritalis affectio* is not 'love' but at most 'friendship'; see e.g. Philippe Ariès, 'Love in Married Life', in *Western Sexuality: Practice and Precept in Past and Present Times*, ed. by Philippe Ariès and André Béjine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 130–39.

the Apostle Paul to bring out the spiritual aspect of marriage as a symbol of the union between Christ and the Church, a relationship which it was not in men's power to dissolve. Even if marriage without sex and children seemed pointless to most medieval theologians, a growing number of theologians idealized chaste marriage. The personal bond of feelings was accentuated over economic, social, and sexual bonds. The spiritual relationship between the man and woman became essential, and for many more important than the reproductive and alliance-creating element in the institution of marriage. We must remember that it was at this time that celibacy became mandatory for clerics: they were said to already have a 'marital' bond to the Church which excluded a fleshly marriage to a woman. The holiness and indissolubility of marriage made it important for the Church's lawyers to determine exactly what made a marriage valid. What was needed to create a holy bond, and where was the point of no return?

The decisive point of a marriage's validity became *consensus*.³ Gratian, the famous master of canon law in Bologna, argued in the 1140s that both consent and sexual intercourse were required for a marriage to be valid. For Gratian, the consent of the man and woman was a vital element, but the marriage was made official by their subsequent sexual union. His view of contracting marriage, therefore, was a combination of traditional ideas and new thoughts on the essence of marriage.

The so-called Paris school led by Peter Lombard (c. 1095–1160) taught that young people who had entered into a mutual pledge to marry at some future time (*verba de futuro*) could validate the marriage either by making a similar pledge in the present (*verba de praesenti*) or by intercourse. Thus, Peter Lombard also taught that only mutual consent between the man and woman could create a valid and indissoluble marriage.

Pope Alexander III (1159–81) issued a series of decretals in which both *verba de praesenti* and *verba de futuro* with subsequent intercourse created a valid marriage. This also included secret marriages with neither the Church's blessing nor the consent of the families.⁴ Alexander III's sense of the finer legal issues and his active Church politics caused this new doctrine of consent to be spread throughout Europe.

Technically, the Church opened the door to marriages in which the family's opinions were irrelevant. Of course, in practice this was not the case. Historians who have seen the beginnings of a more modern understanding of the place of feelings in marriage in the Church's new doctrine have been quick to point out that, to some degree, such a development had already begun during the Middle Ages. But even if theology emphasized the intention behind actions rather than the actions themselves,

³ On *consensus*, see especially John T. Noonan Jr, 'Power to Choose', *Viator*, 4 (1973), 419–34; Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society*, pp. 236–38, 264–65; Brooke, *Medieval Idea*, pp. 126–43.

⁴ Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society*, pp. 332–36.

even the innovator Peter Abelard separated from his Heloise because he could no longer fulfil his marital duty: he had been castrated by Heloise's uncle.⁵

On the other hand, the new theology of marriage has been interpreted as an attempt by the Church to take control of an important facet of people's lives, and certainly the power of the Crown and the way of life and inheritance strategies of the aristocracy. The French historian Georges Duby has portrayed the history of marriage in the High Middle Ages as an ideological battleground between the Church's new model of marriage and the aristocracy's strategies to ensure the continuity of their lineages and retain property within the family.⁶ Schematically, the divide between the two models of marriage seems insurmountable:

Aristocratic marriage model

Validity through transfer of property
Endogamy (marriage with kin)
Polygamy (concubines/mistresses)
Divorce and remarriage possible
Economic/political agreement
between families
A secular matter

Church's marriage model

Validity through consent
Exogamy (outside seventh degree)
Monogamy
Indissolubility
Spiritual/individual union
Under ecclesiastical jurisdiction

Other historians have been sceptical of drawing such clear dividing lines between clerical and secular conceptions of marriage.⁷ In practice, the Church and aristocracy seem to have gone in the same direction. Secret marriages contracted without the knowledge of the families were all but forbidden by the Church, and aristocratic betrothals between small children were often blessed by the clergy. Reproduction and sexual union remained the most important reasons for marriage for most people. Nevertheless, doubts have been raised about whether the Church really formulated new ideas about marriage between men and women. What influence did the new ideas actually have on men and women outside the Church in Norway and Iceland?

⁵ Brooke, *Medieval Idea*, pp. 103–18; M. T. Clanchy, *Abelard: A Medieval Life* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), pp. 183–96.

⁶ Georges Duby, *Medieval Marriage: Two Models from Twelfth-Century France*, Johns Hopkins Symposia in Comparative History, 11 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978); Duby, *The Knight, the Lady, and the Priest: The Making of Modern Marriage in Medieval France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983). See also Jack Goody, *The Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). The so-called 'Goody thesis', that the Church profited economically from the new canonical law on marriage, has now been more or less abandoned; see e.g. Jochen Martin, 'Zur Anthropologie von Heiratsregeln und Besitzübertragung: 10 Jahre nach den Goody-Thesen', *Historische Anthropologie*, 1 (1993), 149–62.

⁷ David Herlihy, 'The Family and Religious Ideologies in Medieval Europe', *Journal of Family History*, 12 (1987), 3–17 (p. 7); Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society*, pp. 194–95; Brooke, *Medieval Idea*, p. 126.

Was it meaningful to ordinary people when clerics talked of the significance of the individual's 'I do' and the emotional bond between marriage partners as the crucial factor in marital life?⁸

Norse Marital Norms: Equality and Honour

What ideas awaited Norwegian and Icelandic clerics as they returned home from abroad with the doctrine of consent in their theological baggage? It is difficult — not to mention theoretically problematic — to separate out attitudes to marriage that can be identified as purely 'secular'. Both laws and sagas written from the end of the twelfth century can be perceived as being influenced by theological trends. At the same time, we have seen that ideas about women's choice and consent were around even before the Church's teaching on marriage was introduced in the mid-twelfth century. When the sagas show a woman's will playing a role in marriage matters, this should not necessarily be attributed to ecclesiastical stealth propaganda for the doctrine of consent.⁹

According to *Grágás*, marriage partners must be *jafnræði*.¹⁰ There is to be equality between the resources the man and the woman bring to the marriage. But *jafnræði* (literally 'equal rule') also meant that marriage partners were to be equal in aspects other than the purely economic. A good example is the public's evaluation of Teitr Guðmundarson's marriage to Oddkatla Þórólfsdóttir in the 1180s. *Guðmundar saga dýra* says she was 'a beautiful woman and knew well how to carry herself [. . .]. It was thought to be an equal match; she was of better kin, while he was richer, and both were very friendly.'¹¹ In this passage family, wealth, personal qualities, appearance,

⁸ The option of choosing one's own marital partner does not necessarily imply that love is the prime motivator; cf. André Burguière, 'The Formation of the Couple', *Journal of Family History*, 12 (1987), 39–53 (p. 40): 'When we evoke marriages of love as a dominant matrimonial model, we confuse two distinct ideas which finally did fuse into one, but only after having evolved along different paths: (1) the idea that young people should be able to decide upon their marriages themselves; and (2) the idea that a love relation and a matrimonial relation are one and the same, that love is the best reason, if not the only reason, for marriage.'

⁹ Ideas of consent can also be found before the twelfth century both in England and in Germany; cf. Christian Gellinek, 'Marriage by Consent in Literary Sources of Medieval Germany', *Studia Gratiana*, 12 (1967), 556–79 (p. 577); Christine Fell, *Women in Anglo-Saxon England and the Impact of 1066* (London: British Museum Publications, 1984), p. 58; Margaret Clunies Ross, 'Concubinage in Anglo-Saxon England', *Past and Present*, 108 (1985), 3–34 (p. 8).

¹⁰ Grg, Ib, 29, 241; II, 156, 162; III, 420; cf. III, 626.

¹¹ Sts, I, 160: 'Hon var væn kona ok kunni sér alt vel [. . .]. Þat þótti jafnræði. Hon var kynstærri, en hann fêmeiri, en hvárt tveggja it vinsælasta.' This is the editors' correction, while the manuscript reads: 'hann var kynstærri, en hon fêmeiri'. Whichever is correct is not of great relevancy for my argument.

and the admiration of others are important factors in the equation on which a marriage's *jafnræði* was based. The same saga tells of Guðrún Þórðardóttir's marriage to Símon Þorvarðsson. She was 'the most beautiful and courteous woman. She owned both a farm and cattle there. She was young and had taken the inheritance from her father. She was considered to be the best match among women of equal standing.' Less is told of Símon, but he was 'a friendly man and the match seemed to be equal between them'.¹²

Such a public evaluation of the bride and groom was, of course, closely connected to the philosophy of honour. Within the term *jafnræði* lies a test of their position in society; the honour men had accumulated through inheritance, personal qualities, and deeds was now weighed up. In the hunt for a spouse, one had to make one's self into a 'text', to endure being 'read aloud' by one's peers. Friendships, wealth, family, and appearance were all 'signs' which lay open to all. For those who wanted to go courting, therefore, it was important to be certain of how the *giptingarmaðr* would 'read' him; the fallout would spell out his status in black and white and was something he would have to live with the rest of his life. For men, therefore, courtship was a serious step requiring circumspection and care. Ketill Þorsteinsson, later Bishop of Hólar, tells that he and his brother were seen as promising young men at the end of the eleventh century. Ketill's status and honour were significantly improved when he 'got the match that seemed the best'.¹³ To be a 'promising' young man was latent social capital to be invested in a courtship that would yield a return if his suit was accepted.

As a rule, it was the *giptingarmaðr* (guardian) who made the definitive assessment of the suitor's status and honour. In the 1160s, the chieftain Sturla Þórðarson courted Ingibjörg, a daughter of the wealthy and powerful Þorgeirr Hallason and 'the most beautiful woman in Iceland at that time'. In other words, she is quite a catch, and Sturla has to brace himself for a thorough assessment. In this case things go well, since Þorgeirr 'knew by hearsay that Sturla was an important man, with great kin and a great future as a chieftain'.¹⁴ If the suitor was refused by the *giptingarmaðr*, it could be taken as an insult to the suitor's honour. When Þorfinnr Qnundarson courts Guðmundr dýri's unmarried daughter Ingibjörg at the end of the twelfth century, the two are found to be related. Guðmundr refuses to allow the marriage 'since neither the law of God nor of the land permits it'.¹⁵ Þorfinnr and his father nevertheless regard Guðmundr's

¹² Sts, I, 168–69: 'Hon var kvenna vænst ok kurteisust. Hon átti þar bæði land ok bú. Hon var ung kona ok hafði tekit við föðurleifð sinni. Hon þótti þar beztr kostr jafnborinna kvenna. Hennar bað sá maðr, er Símon hét, er kallaðr var kamphundr. Hann var vinsæll maðr, ok þótti þat jafnræði með þeim.'

¹³ Sts, I, 47: 'Ek fékk ok þann kost, er beztr þótti vera.'

¹⁴ Sts, I, 66: 'Hon var vænst kvenna í þann tíð á Íslandi [. . .]. Hann hafði spurðaga af Sturlu, at hann var mikilmenni ok ættstórr ok líkligr til höfðingja.'

¹⁵ Sts, I, 175: 'En þar var frændsemi með þeim, ok kallaði Guðmundr þat eigi sitt ráð at gefa hana Þorfinni, þar [sem] hvárki var til Guðs lög né lands.'

refusal as a clear affront. They clearly consider Guðmundr's reference to the law as a bad excuse for ending the courtship. Some time later Þorfinnr begins to visit Ingibjörg without Guðmundr's approval. As we have seen, such visits function as a challenge to the woman's *giptingarmaðr*. In Þorfinnr's case, he perhaps means to pay Guðmundr back for the humiliation to which he himself was subjected. The balance of honour between chieftains is put to the test, but in this instance the situation ends peacefully. Ingibjörg and Þorfinnr marry despite the obstacles in their way.

In a few cases, the sagas depict couples who are not generally considered *jafnræði*. Ólof, a young and beautiful woman, is married to the elderly priest Þorgrímr. Some, like Hallr Þjóðólfsson, regard the marriage as incongruous. He says that 'that should never happen again, that an old man tainted such a beautiful woman, and he took her from him along with his horse, called Máni, the best of horses'.¹⁶ For Hallr, the fact that a weak cleric could have such a beautiful wife (and such a good horse into the bargain) is jarring enough to cause him to act. In doing so he represents a view of equality between marriage partners that we find in the heroic tradition. The woman should be married to the bravest and strongest man. The distinctly spiritual qualities of Þorgrímr are not as highly valued by Hallr as they may be by Þorgrímr himself.

Hallr is not alone in his traditional view of the qualities that are important for a marriageable man in the twelfth century. The chieftain Páll Þórðarson in Vatnsfjörðr may have similar criteria when he takes Hallgerðr Rúnólfsdóttir. She is described as 'the most beautiful woman, most outstanding and splendid in all matters'.¹⁷ From this she can be construed as a very good match, but unfortunately for Páll, she is already married to the priest Óláfr Sölvason. Like Hallr, Páll seems to see the marriage with a priest as beneath her dignity. The two kidnappers thus function as a social control by taking good women away from 'weak' men. The priest's role and spiritual values were still new to Icelandic society in the twelfth century and not highly valued by the secular aristocracy.

Thus, *jafnræði* is an important norm for marriage in both the law and the sagas. Were good relations between husband and wife also an ideal, and was the principle of *jafnræði* in itself a guarantee that the marriage would function well? We are not always told how matters turn out with couples after the wedding, but there is a clear pattern in the contemporary sagas that marriages between *jafnræði* partners were regarded as 'good'.

The marriage between Oddkatla and Teitr Guðmundarson is one of the few equal marriages that ends in divorce. In this case he is richer and she comes from a better family.¹⁸ The circumstances show that the divorce has a very special background.

¹⁶ Sts, I, 78: 'Han kvað þat aldri skyldu lengr, at gamall maðr flekkaði svá væna konu, ok tók hana af honum ok svá hest hans, er Máni hét, allra hesta beztr.'

¹⁷ Sts, I, 103: 'Hon var kvenna vænst ok merkiligust ok mestr skörungur at öllu.'

¹⁸ Or vice versa, see note in Sts, I, 550. The disdain for rich suitors of low social status is not as explicit in the twelfth century as it was later to become. Another marriage where social and economic factors are weighed against each other is that of Þorlaug Pálsdóttir and Þórir

Everyone knows that the marriage was happy, so friends and relations are mystified when Oddkatla demands her property. Her father asks for an explanation. As it turns out, Oddkatla does not want a divorce in the usual sense, but a division of the estate. She had seen Teitr at a feast in Iceland when he was actually supposed to be in Norway. This is a clear omen to everyone that Teitr is dead, and Oddkatla gets her portion of the property from the marriage. She promises that if she is wrong, she will not be divorced from Teitr either with respect to property or domestic arrangements.¹⁹ The episode shows public opinion in harmony with the couple's own understanding. 'All' regarded the marriage as *jafnræði* and good, and Oddkatla does not contradict this assessment.

As we have seen, the marriage of Guðrún Þórðardóttir and Símon Þorvarðsson is also called *jafnræði*. Guðrún nevertheless declares that she cannot live with him for very long at a time. Accordingly, she goes back to live with her father every once in a while. Símon endures a great deal, and continues with his daily work until one day he drowns in the fjord. Then Guðrún misses him desperately; his patient nature, despite everything, was the perfect complement to her tempestuous disposition. Guðrún's sorrow for Símon underscores the good and equal relationship between spouses in spite of the times she went back to her parents. Her two subsequent husbands do not fit her: they are not *jafnræði* with her and she is not faithful to either of them. The saga's depiction of Guðrún's three marriages emphasizes the importance of discerning a good marriage from a bad one. The equality of marital partners acts as catalyst for a happy life together.

We close this section by returning to the relationship between Þorfinnr Önundarson and Ingibjörg Guðmundardóttir as described in *Guðmundar saga dýra*. The balance of honour is threatened when Guðmundr initially forbids Þorfinnr's courtship of his daughter and he later visits Ingibjörg without Guðmundr's knowledge. When the saga notes that their 'life together was happy', this may be intended to indicate that the social balance between the two households was restored. Their happy life together, thus, has a wider significance than mere *jafnræði* between marriage partners. It also signals *jafnræði* and balance between the households of their parents. As we will see, the contemporary sagas were more concerned with the unhappy marriages simply because they made bigger waves in society.

Þorsteinsson in the 1170s. Þórir is rich, but Þorlaug is a chieftain's daughter. Páll goes along with Þórir's courtship but insists on making the financial arrangements himself, perhaps to even out the differences between the pair. They enjoy a good marriage even though they have no children. When Þorlaug wants to go to Rome after seven years of marriage, Þórir gives up his good position in Iceland and goes with her 'for the sake of love' (*fyrir ástar sakir*) (Sts, I, 106). See Agnes S. Arnórsdóttir, *Konur og vígamenn: Staða kynjanna á Íslandi á 12. og 13. öld*, Sagnfræðirannsóknir, 12 (Reykjavík: Sagnfræðistofnun, Háskóla Íslands, 1995) on the financial arrangements in this marriage. The conflict over inheritance after the couple die, the so-called *Deildartungumál*, is analyzed by Jesse Byock, *Feud in the Icelandic Saga* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), pp. 154–60.

¹⁹ Sts, I, 162: 'fjárhlut né samvistu'.

Woman's Will and Man's Honour

We have already encountered the early medieval concept of *heroic consent*, that a man had to seek his wife's acknowledgement throughout the marriage. Do we find a similar attitude to marriage around 1200? What explanation is given for marriages that do not work?

Only seldom do we hear that the woman's will plays a part in contracting a marriage. However, this does not mean that women were unable to act independently. Yngvildr Þórðardóttir is a rich and well-respected woman widowed in 1119. *Þorgils saga ok Haflíða* tells that she then moves in with the priest Ingimundr and enters into community of property (*félag*) with him.²⁰ In this case it is Yngvildr herself who is the active party. As a widow, she has a greater authority over her own destiny than a woman who has never been married.²¹ This may be because unmarried women were regarded as having little or no will before marriage, but upon marriage they assumed the keys and responsibility for running a household. However, this picture may need some modification. Most accounts of marriages in the contemporary sagas mention nothing about the woman's will, even if she is a widow. Ingibjörg Þorgeirsdóttir, who was married to Sturla Þórðarson, and Guðrún Þórðardóttir were both widows, but for neither do we hear anything about the choice of their next husband. In the latter instance, the saga relates that Guðrún leaps out of bed when her new husband comes to consummate the marriage; this does not exactly sound like she chose him herself!

On the other hand, Guðrún's wedding-night reaction shows that women *did* have preferences, and that in some cases the saga writer considered them important enough to write about. One may suspect that widows like Ingibjörg and Guðrún chose to leave the selection of suitors to their nearest kinsmen. The few cases in the contemporary sagas where women had an influence on their marriages show that women could use kinship and friendship connections to deflect unwelcome suitors. One example is how Heiðar-Gróa Hermundardóttir fends off the man she does not want. Her brother and the suitor she does want to marry make sure he never bothers her again.²²

In a single instance, the bride's will is emphasized in an account of a marriage, and that is mainly because her consent is lacking. In *Prestssaga Guðmundar góða*, set in the 1160s, Úlfheiðr Gunnarsdóttir is married against her will. Later, Ari Þorgeirsson falls in love with her and they have four children together.²³ We are not told

²⁰ Sts, I, 23.

²¹ See Jenny M. Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), pp. 61–63; Agnes S. Arnórsdóttir, *Konur og vígamenn*. A similar informal style of cohabitation is seen in the case of the wealthy widow Þorgerðr Þorgeirsdóttir and the smith Ingimundr. Ingimundr was a sort of handyman who helped Þorgerðr. As they are fond of each other, and no other obstacles are in the way, Ingimundr moves into Þorgerðr's house; Sts, I, 171.

²² Sts, I, 203.

²³ Sts, I, 118.

who Úlfheiðr's first husband was; in the saga writer's eyes, he is hardly worth remembering. This is almost an excuse for Úlfheiðr's relationship with Ari and offers an explanation of why no less a person than Bishop Guðmundr Arason was born out of wedlock. This example surely represents the exception rather than the rule. On the other hand, Úlfheiðr's dissolution of her marriage indicates that women had more opportunity to get a divorce than to influence the arrangement of the marriage. The woman's will was a factor men had to take into account.

It is worthwhile to note that women are seen as the active party in marital crises. Besides Úlfheiðr's change of partner, we have already seen that Oddkatla wants to dissolve her marriage to Teitr Guðmundarson because she believes he is dead. Even if Oddkatla's motive is unique, the portrayals at least show that a wife *could* do such a thing if she had a good enough reason; what friends and relations reacted to, according to the saga, was that they had believed the marriage was happy. The 1170s saw a divorce of Birningr Steinarsson and Helga Þorgeirsdóttir, and the reason given is their bad relationship. The saga says that *they* could not agree; it is understood that Helga is just as much to blame for their differences as Birningr.²⁴

This absence of 'unity' or 'love' between marriage partners was the most common reason for divorce if we are to believe the contemporary sagas. *Hvamm-Sturlas saga* tells that Yngvildr Þorgilsdóttir, sister of one of the most powerful chieftains in Iceland in the last decades of the twelfth century, 'did not come to love Halldórr, her husband. Still, things went tolerably while Þorgils, her father, lived, but later they could not get along.'²⁵ Guðrún Þórðardóttir also goes home to her father when her marriage becomes too difficult. This gives her a temporary breathing space when life with her husband is not working out. Þórdís Brúsadóttir and Þorgerðr Þorgeirsdóttir find support among their kin when they do not wish to continue living with their husbands.²⁶ Þorgerðr Þorgeirsdóttir leaves the man she is living with, Ingimundr, to go to her daughter and son-in-law, the priest Helgi. Þorgerðr believes Ingimundr has visited a woman at a neighbouring farm too often and finally decides she has had enough. When Ingimundr wants to take Þorgerðr back, Helgi refuses to let him have her. Helgi supports his mother-in-law to the hilt: 'I do not want Þorgerðr to be forced to be dragged between the farms here, and it is up to her where she will stay.'²⁷ Ingimundr is furious and kills Helgi; he may have understood Helgi's stance as an insult that he had lost control of 'his' woman.

²⁴ Sts, I, 102.

²⁵ Sts, I, 69: 'Yngvildr Þorgilsdóttir varð eikki unnandi Halldóri, bónda sínum — ok var með nökkurum hæfingum, meðan Þorgils, faðir hennar, var við, en síðan nýttu þau ekki af.'

²⁶ Þórdís Brúsadóttir leaves Þorgeirr Arnórsson to go to her sister and brother-in-law Tanni. Tanni tells Þorgeirr that Þórdís will not move from his house against her will. Þorgeirr then kills Tanni and is outlawed: Sts, I, 95.

²⁷ Sts, I, 172: 'Þat vilda ek, at Þorgerðr sé aldri nauðig hér dregin í milli húsa, ok skal vist hennar heimil, hvárt hon vill heldr vera.'

I believe that what we see here are traces of a Norse domestic ethic that guaranteed that a woman's will was significant in marriage. One reason for this may be that the Norse kinship structure was bilateral, but this does not automatically mean that women received support from their relatives when they left a marriage. It could not have made it easier for these relatives that such support involved a direct danger of having to defend the woman against the husband she had left, failure of financial settlements, and an indirect disadvantage as alliances between different kinship groups dissolved. But saga writers are far from negative in their depictions of women that break marriage alliances after marital discord. Traditionally, it has been argued that marriage created strong bonds between a man and his wife's family.²⁸ However, throughout the thirteenth century there are more and more conflicts between kin and in-laws. It was often necessary to strengthen ties by marriage with friendship in order for the marriage to function as a means of alliance.²⁹ The woman's ability to end a marriage meant that ties between in-laws did not necessarily last a lifetime.

In the sagas of Icelanders, divorce was also accompanied by another aspect: the abandoned husband lost his personal honour. As in the contemporary sagas, we encounter women who leave their husbands and go back to their fathers without drawing down disapproval on themselves. In *Kormáks saga*, Steingerðr is married to Bersi against her will. This is not grounds for divorce in itself. She does have grounds for divorce after her husband, Bersi, loses in single combat and his buttocks are cut off: 'After these events, Steingerðr got tired of Bersi and said that she wanted a divorce [. . .] she said she did not want to have the cripple Bersi.'³⁰ Although her father had arranged the match without consulting her, she is in a different position now that she has been married. For Bersi, the divorce means loss of honour, or rather an elucidation of the loss of honour he suffered when he was maimed. Steingerðr does not divorce Bersi because she loves another man, but because she finds an opportunity where 'everyone' can see that she has grounds to do it.³¹

Heroic consent was going strong in Iceland around 1200. Just as a woman's love gave her lover honour outside marriage, the wife's acknowledgement gave honour to

²⁸ Cf. William Ian Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking: Feud, Law, and Society in Saga Iceland* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), pp. 167–71; Kirsten Hastrup, *Culture and History in Medieval Iceland: An Anthropological Analysis of Structure and Change* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), pp. 89–100.

²⁹ Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, *Chieftains and Power in the Icelandic Commonwealth*, The Viking Collection, 12 (Odense: Odense University Press, 1999).

³⁰ Krm ch. 13: 'Við þessa atburði lagði Steingerðr leiðendi á við Bersa ok vill skilja við hann [. . .] kvezk eigi vilja eiga Bersa orkumlaðan.'

³¹ Steingerðr later consents to her marriage to Þorvaldr tinteinn (Krm ch. 17), and at the end of the saga gets the opportunity to live with Kormákr, the skald who loves her. Then she chooses to continue her marriage with Þorvaldr instead (ch. 26). Other divorces on the initiative of women are found in Lnd (S) ch. 152; Drls chs 8–9; Reykd ch. 11.

her husband within marriage.³² If it was the *giptingarmaðr* who had the power to interpret the suitor as a ‘text’, it was the wife who interpreted the same man as worthy/*jafnræði* after the wedding. A crisis arose if the wife’s respect and loyalty were absent, just as *giptingarmenn* feared it would if strange men visited the household. This shows that love was expected to grow out of a *well*-arranged marriage. When there was no love, that was not the woman’s fault: it was the fault of the *giptingarmaðr* or husband.

The time I have spent on the significance of divorce may seem surprising to some. Many argue that divorce was the exception, not the rule. I would simply point out that, like Steingerðr, one had to have generally accepted grounds for a divorce; it was not just an easy solution for all women. Moreover, this pattern is corroborated by certain regulations on marriage and divorce in *Grágás*.³³ Besides the regulations derived from canon law, women had the right to a divorce in cases of physical abuse or if the husband wanted to take her out of the country against her will. In some cases *Grágás* even allowed women to decide for themselves whether a suitor was good enough to accept. The condition was that her head of household had to have turned down two *jafnræði* suitors on two occasions. Then the woman could attach herself to the third *jafnræði* man who came along. Even if the provision only applied to women over twenty, and only if another relative was consulted, it indicates that the principle of equality was superior to the absolute right of the *giptingarmaðr* to determine marriage arrangements. In such cases, the woman also had the right to ‘read’ the man before the marriage was settled on.

The dissolution of marriage alliances created major problems for magnates as the power struggles of the Sturlung Age erupted. This is very clear in the divorce of Ingibjörg, Snorri Sturluson’s daughter, and the chieftain Gizurr Þorvaldsson in 1231. This marriage was clearly meant as a political alliance in a time when the power struggles were growing in scale. Snorri and Gizurr were among the few who were beginning to have ambitions of controlling the whole island, and the alliances that were sealed between them were very important for maintaining a degree of political stability between the two families. The marriage of Ingibjörg and Gizurr had its own conflicts, and most people believed they were more her fault than his. Snorri and Þorvaldr tried to invest more financial resources in the marriage to promote ‘unity’ between the couple, but this had no effect.³⁴

³² The so-called *First Grammatical Treatise* from the mid-twelfth century contains a short proverbial sentence: ‘Of her husband many (a woman) is so fond that she hardly ever takes her eyes off him’ (FGT, p. 221); cf. Anne Holtsmark, *En islandsk scholasticus fra det 12. århundrede*, Skrifter utgitt av Det Norske Videnskaps-Akademi i Oslo, II Hist.-Filos. Klasse, 1936:3 (Oslo: Dybwad, 1936), pp. 100–04.

³³ Grg, Ib, 39–44, 55, 235–36; II, 168–73, 203–04.

³⁴ Sts, I, 346: ‘gáfu þeim þá til samþykkis sín tuttugu hundruð hvárr þeira’.

Snorri's other daughter, Hallbera, had a similar experience. She divorced her first husband and did not do too much better with her second, the chieftain Kolbeinn Arnórsson. Hallbera went back to her father, but Snorri tried to send her back to Kolbeinn. Then she went to her mother instead, where she later died without ever getting the divorce.³⁵ Later, Gizurr and Kolbeinn became their former father-in-law's worst enemies. Snorri's strategy for his daughters' marriages had been to gather property and power, and he thought to himself that no one had better sons-in-law than he.³⁶ His cousin, Sturla Bárðarson, disagreed in verse:

Eiguð áþekkt mægi
orðvitr sem gat forðum,
— ojaðnaðr gefsk jafnan
illa —, Hleðrar stillir. (Sts, I, 320; Skj B, II, 54)

You got relatives by marriage like the word-wise ruler of Lejre got long ago.
Inequality often brings evil.

The ruler of Lejre was the legendary King Hrólfr kraki, who was betrayed by his brother-in-law and killed. Sturla's verse prophesied a similar fate for Snorri Sturluson. The divorces finally shattered his connections by marriage with Kolbeinn and Gizurr. Snorri's position of power disintegrated, and in 1241 his former sons-in-law conspired to bring about his death.³⁷

Thus, Icelanders had an idea of women's consent that resembled the older heroic model. It was also similar to the Roman understanding of *consensus*, where the parties' *intentions* and *will* to be married were more important than the formulations at the wedding. The job of the *giptingarmaðr* was to marry his daughter to a man who was equal; that would ensure a happy and stable marriage. Although *giptingarmenn*

³⁵ Sts, I, 304, 333, 335.

³⁶ Sts, I, 319: 'ok þá mátti engi höfðingi keppa við hann fyrir sakir mægða þeira, er hann átti'.

³⁷ Snorri's marriage strategies contributed to his wealth, but his daughters were not married for very long, and the powerful alliances crumbled. Eventually, he had his former sons-in-law as enemies, and his daughters had only produced one illegitimate granddaughter. While the Sturlungs had profited by strategic marriages from the late twelfth century, chieftains in the thirteenth century were not as inclined to use marriage as means of creating alliances. One example is Jón Loftsson's two sons Sæmundr and Ormr, who never married at all (Sts, I, 242–43). Sæmundr Jónsson was even offered the daughter of Haraldr Maddaðarson, Earl of the Orkneys, but never bothered to travel that far. Instead they had concubines that produced heirs and made alliances. The formal distinction between a wife and a concubine was that a wife had been bought with *mundr* (bride-price). According to a recent study, concubinage could be based on emotions, but also implied commitments to the woman's family. But often the distinction between a wife and a concubine could be vague, not least because of the new doctrine on consensual marriage; cf. Auður G. Magnúsdóttir, *Frillor och fruar: Politik och samlevnad på Island, 1120–1400*, Avhandlingar från Historiska Institutionen i Göteborg, 29 (Gothenburg: Historiska institutionen, University of Gothenburg, 2001), pp. 54–59.

had the power at that time to marry kinswomen off against their will, they could not force them to be loyal and dutiful to their husbands for the rest of their lives. When great wealth and political interests were at stake, divorce could have fatal consequences. For the suitor, it was important to obtain approval for his courtship: he ran the risk of being seen as a social inferior to a family who rejected his suit. A suitor had to think carefully about which women he had a realistic chance of getting, and not aim too high or too low. But the *giptingarmaðr*'s approval of the match also had to be confirmed by the woman's acknowledgement after the wedding. Thus, he also had to consider whether the woman would remain loyal to him; if not, he would be gambling on his own honour. Ideas of heroic consent may have given a woman a certain position of power, but social norms also set limits for a woman's ability to negotiate. If public opinion regarded the marriage as *jafnræði*, it must have been difficult for a woman to claim otherwise. Divorce without any grounds could easily backfire.

Opposition to the Church's Doctrine of Marriage

The international structure of the Church meant that the new doctrine of marriage was promulgated in Norway not later than about 1160, and possibly by the time the archbishopric of Níðaróss was established in 1152/53. With Archbishop Eysteinn Erlendsson (1157–88) came the will and power to enforce canon law. In the 1160s and 1170s, Church law was revised and supplemented through a lively correspondence with the papal see.³⁸ Upon enquiry by Eysteinn, Pope Alexander III wrote that consent was a necessary condition for marriage, while sexual intercourse had little effect on the situation: 'Everything is invalid, as is coitus, when consent is missing.'³⁹ But if consent was given once after intercourse, the relationship was indissoluble in the eyes of the Church. Archbishop Eysteinn followed this ruling up by introducing consent in the Church law section of the *Frostapingslög*.⁴⁰

In Iceland, the doctrine of consent was known by 1189 at the latest. In that year, Archbishop Eiríkr Ívarsson (1189–1205) sent a letter to the two Icelandic bishops establishing that marriage was only valid if entered into with *jaquede hennar sialfrar*, with the woman's own consent.⁴¹ Surely the higher-ranking clerics in Iceland were also aware of this doctrine before 1189. Bishop Þorlákr Þórhallsson (1178–93), one of the most reform-minded bishops in Iceland in the entire High Middle Ages, had studied in Paris and Lincoln in the 1150s. It is hard to imagine how he could have

³⁸ Erik Gunnes, *Erkebiskop Øystein: Statsmann og kirkebygger* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1996), pp. 130–39; Knut Helle, *Norge blir en stat, 1130–1319*, *Handbok i Norges historie*, 3, 2nd edn (Bergen: Universitetsforlaget, 1974), pp. 62–65.

³⁹ LD no. 12, p. 66: 'omnia etiam cum ipso coitu, si absque consensu, frustrantur'.

⁴⁰ F III 3.

⁴¹ DI, I, no. 71 (1189), p. 287.

avoided being aware of the debate surrounding consent in that period. Fortunately, good sources survive for Þorlákr's marriage programme and the subsequent conflict he had with Icelandic magnates. Þorlákr's zeal to reform the marital ideals of his countrymen will thus be a good starting point to see how clerics introduced concepts like *maritalis affectio* and *consensus* to a Norse public.

A letter from Archbishop Eysteinn Erlendsson in 1180 to the foremost chieftains in Iceland takes up the issue of Icelanders' domestic arrangements. Eysteinn complains that the chieftains 'live the lives of cattle, not respecting marriage, that holy bond that must not break'. The Archbishop believed that great effort was called for in order to sharpen the morals of the chieftains and thereby win over the wider populace: 'But because chieftains have such bad lives on their consciences, we cannot expect that chiding words will have any effect on the common people. Then all will remain the same, neither more nor less.'⁴² Bishop Þorlákr was the man with the power and will to carry through Eysteinn's Gregorian reforms. In Þorlákr's time, there were conflicts between the Church and magnates over Church property, ecclesiastical legal jurisdiction, and not least the magnates' sexual morals. This is perhaps less surprising when we consider that Þorlákr's penitential was one of the strictest in Europe. Þorlákr clearly believed that strong measures were needed to change the chieftains' practices in this area.⁴³

The older *Þorláks saga* gives the following account of Þorlákr's programme for reforming the institution of marriage:

Hann lagði á þat mikla stund at halda þeim mǫnnum saman er tengðir vǫru helgum hjúskap, en lagði þeim mǫnnum þunga hluti á hendr í fēgjöldum ok skriptum er af því brugðu stórum. Þótti honum sem Guði myndi í því mest mótgörð, er þat eptirlæti er

⁴² DI, I, no. 54 (1179–80), pp. 262–63: 'En of engan hlut synest oss meira á fatt. helldur en vm ohreinlife manna hier. og kvenna far. er eigi þarf fyrri yckur at skyra vm. hversv stadfest bodord. er. af gvdz sjalfs mǫnne bodit. En þier hafit þat med suivirding firrtz ener agæstustu menn. lifit bufiar life. rekit eigi hiuskap. ne þat helga samband er iegí ma slitna. nema kona manz hore under hann. og þo med þeim einvm hætte. at hvortvegia halldi sier fra savrlife medan þav lifa bæda. eða saman byggiazt. En med því at hofdinngiar hafa slíka ohæfv j sinne samviskv. og af því treystazt þeir eigi hirtingar ord at hafa fyrri alþydv. þa er þar komit at allra rad hallast j einn stad. ens meira. og hins minna'; cf. DI, I, no. 38 (1173–74), p. 221: 'svmer hafa konvr sinar latit, ok horkonur under þær tekit, svmer hafa hvarartveggju, jnan hus [med] sier og lifa so ogæzskv life, er alla kristna menn dregur til synda' (Some [chieftains] have left their wives and taken adulterous women in their place. Some have both [a wife and an adulterous woman] in their houses with them. They are conducting an evil life that draws all Christian men into sin),

⁴³ The penitential of Þorlákr is printed in DI, I, no. 43, pp. 240–44, and (with corrections) in Sveinbjörn Rafnsson, 'Skriftaboð Þorláks biskups', *Gripla*, 5 (1982), 77–114; see also Sveinbjörn Rafnsson, 'Þorlákskriftir og hjúskapur á 12. og 13. öld', *Saga*, 20 (1982), 114–29; Sveinbjörn Rafnsson, 'The Penitential of St. Þorlákur in its Icelandic Context', *Bulletin of Medieval Canon Law*, n.s., 15 (1985), 19–30. See also above, chapter 6.

hann hefir mest veitt monnum þessa heims hluta ok gort þat fyrir ástir sakir ok miskunnar sinnar ok girnðar mannanna rétt ok blezat, sem hofuðsynð er elligar, ef þat var herfiliga hneist ok rangliga raskat. En þau fé er menn guldu fyrir vanhagi sína lét hann aldregi koma við annat fé, heldr lagði hann þat til þess at þau hjú, er vel váru saman ok félaus váru, mætti þá heldr saman vera en áðr, ok yrði þeim þat nokkut til skjóls ok yfirbóta sinna óráða er féin hofðu látit. (PsA ch. 15)

He made great effort to hold those people together that were bound in holy matrimony, and lay heavy penalties and confession on those who had offended greatly against this. He thought that God would be most offended if that gift, which is the greatest He gave to men on this earth, and which He made because of His love and mercy to alter men's lust into something legal and blessed instead of what otherwise would be a deadly sin, should be wretchedly dishonoured and unjustly violated. But the money that men paid for their sins was not mixed with other money. He rather put it aside for those spouses that lived well together but were without means, so that they could continue to be together. Thus, he used this money for some amendment and compensation for those misdeeds committed by the penalized parties.

This account shows that Þorlákr was inspired by the continental Church's attitude to marriage. First of all, we note that he viewed marriage as instituted by God to prevent people from living in sin. Secondly, the emotional bond between spouses was important for Þorlákr, and such bonds contributed to the indissoluble nature of marriage. Here, Þorlákr was surely inspired by St Augustine. In *De bonum coniugali*, Augustine defended marriage because it provided a wholesome outlet for sexual urges, *libido*. He believed that God had instituted marriage for three good purposes: *fides*, *proles*, and *sacramentum* (fidelity, offspring, and the sacramental and indissoluble bond between husband and wife). For Augustine, the lusts of the flesh became mortal sins after the Fall, and marriage was a way to lead human lust in the proper channels. We find similar reasoning in the works of Hugh of St Victor (d. 1141), who taught in Paris. He took up Augustine's teaching that marriage was based on a bond of love between husband and wife. The chaste marriage of Mary and Joseph set an example. The sexual element was unimportant, almost distracting to a good marriage.⁴⁴ Thus, ideals like these were behind Þorlákr's marriage programme. But was the doctrine of consent really a key issue for him? How did the fight for holy matrimony turn out in practice?

⁴⁴ The body of literature on Augustine's view on marriage and sexuality is immense, but good introductions include David G. Hunter, 'Introduction', in *Marriage in the Early Church: Sources of Early Christian Thought* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), pp. 1–28; Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society*, pp. 89–91; Brooke, *Medieval Idea*, pp. 54–56. On Hugh of St Victor's view on marriage, see Duby, *The Knight*, pp. 181–83; Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society*, pp. 197–98; Brooke, *Medieval Idea*, pp. 278–79. Hugh hardly had any direct influence on the formation of a marriage theology in the twelfth century, but he might have inspired the students at St Victor, which included several Norwegians and possibly some Icelanders; cf. Gunnes, *Erkebiskop Øystein*, pp. 85–89.

Historians' discussion of this question has primarily turned on two matters relating to the new doctrine of marriage: the fight against incest and fornication. It was on these points that Þorlákr's conflict with the chieftains was sharpest. The dispute with the chieftain Jón Loptsson became very intense indeed. Jón held a chieftainship in a time when Icelandic aristocrats and clerics had long lived in relatively peaceful coexistence.⁴⁵ In addition to being a chieftain, Jón is also described as 'the most wise man in clerical skills [. . .] consecrated a deacon, and a great man for the holy Church'.⁴⁶

At the same time, Jón had a great attraction to women and had many illegitimate children. One of the mistresses he lived with was Ragnheiðr, who was none other than Bishop Þorlákr's sister. *Oddaverjapáttir* describes the conflict the situation created between Jón and Þorlákr.⁴⁷ According to the story, Jón and Ragnheiðr had loved each other since childhood and, as adults, did not want to be separated from one another. For Þorlákr, the relationship involves double adultery: Jón is married to another woman, and Ragnheiðr has children by other men than Jón. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that Þorlákr decides to excommunicate Jón. Jón does not want to be forced into giving up Ragnheiðr: 'Not your excommunication nor the power of any man can make me depart from my difficult position, until God himself breathes into my soul that I willingly shall depart from it.'⁴⁸

Jón's reply is often interpreted as a proud Icелander's defiance of foreign norms. But according to *Oddaverjapáttir*, Jón is nevertheless obliged to admit that Þorlákr is right in condemning as sinful his living with Ragnheiðr and the other mistresses, and that his excommunication was justly pronounced (*veit ek [. . .] at bann þitt er rétt*). And several months later Jón does actually send Ragnheiðr away. The story gives no direct explanation for Jón's actions, but it is clear that God really breathed into his heart that he had to give Ragnheiðr up. *Oddaverjapáttir*'s depiction of Jón's life includes many such direct interventions by God. The story thus makes the conflict between Jón and Þorlákr into a moral tale of God's power to change the attitudes of

⁴⁵ Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *The Age of the Sturlungs: Icelandic Civilization in the Thirteenth Century*, Islandica, 36 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1953), pp. 107–11; Jesse Byock, *Medieval Iceland: Society, Sagas, and Power* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 156–57.

⁴⁶ ÞsB ch. 22: 'Hann var inn vísasti maðr á klerkligar listir, þær sem hann hafði numit af sínum forellrum. Hann var djákn at vígslu, raddmaðr mikill í heilagri kirkju.'

⁴⁷ This *páttir* is not preserved independently, but is incorporated into the later versions of *Þorláks saga*. It has been associated either with the first part of the thirteenth century or with the conflict over the property of the churches in the 1270s and 1280s. The latter dating seems preferable; cf. Ármann Jakobsson and Ásðís Egilsdóttir, 'Er Oddaverjapáttir treystandi?', *Ný Saga*, 11 (1999), 91–100; Orri Vésteinsson, *The Christianization of Iceland: Priests, Power, and Social Change 1000–1300* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 99–101.

⁴⁸ ÞsB ch. 27: 'ok ekki mun bann yðvart skilja mik frá vandræðum mínum né nokkurs manns nauðung, til þess er Guð andar því í brjóst mér at skiljask viljandi við þau'.

proud magnates and establish the Church's moral struggle as righteous.⁴⁹ Besides this crusade against fornication, Þorlákr was most concerned with preventing marriages between close relatives. He tried to dissolve all such marriages within his own bishopric and excommunicated those who refused to obey. It may sometimes appear that this was such an important point with Þorlákr that it overshadowed the significance of the marital bond.⁵⁰

An example is the relationship between Þorvaldr Gizurarson and Jóra Klængsdóttir. They were married and loved one another but were too closely related. In 1185, Þorvaldr went to the Archbishop in Niðaróss to obtain a dispensation from canon law. Archbishop Eysteinn gave Þorvaldr and Jóra permission to live together for ten years, after which they had to separate.⁵¹ First of all, the episode shows that the aristocracy were familiar with the ban on incest and had to submit to zealous bishops' involvement in such matters from the 1180s onward. Secondly, Þorvaldr's journey to Niðaróss shows a will on the part of the couple to live in accordance with the Church's new rules. But it also shows that the Church's teaching on incest could mean that a 'good' marriage, that is, a life together based on *jafnræði* and mutual respect, could be broken up as a result of Þorlákr's marriage programme.⁵²

A couple who were not as concerned about the opinion of senior clerics were Snælaug Hognadóttir and the priest Þórðr Bøðvarsson. Their story is characterized by the love shared by the couple and by a very special background.⁵³ *Oddaverjaþáttur* relates that Snælaug has a daughter when she is still living at home with her father,

⁴⁹ *Páls saga* and the older *Þorláks saga*, both written during the first decades of the thirteenth century, are far less concerned with the fight between Þorlákr and Jón. This might be because these two sagas were written while Jón's sons were still alive, and that the conflict is hidden among the anonymous reproached chieftains, or because *Oddaverjaþáttur* constructed a conflict between the Bishop and chieftain for its own purpose based on rumours and stories about chieftains in general.

⁵⁰ Cf. Magnús Stefánsson, 'Kirkjuvald eflist', in *Saga Íslands*, vol. II, ed. by Sigurður Lindal (Reykjavík: Sögufélagið, 1975), pp. 57–144 (pp. 104–05).

⁵¹ Sts, I, 230. Jóra was the daughter of Bishop Klængr Þorsteinsson, the predecessor of Þorlákr, and his cousin Yngvildr Þorgilsdóttir; cf. Sveinbjörn Rafnsson, 'Penitential', p. 29; Jochens, *Women*, p. 39.

⁵² The marriage between Ingibjörg Guðmundardóttir and Þorfinnr Önundarson in 1192 was not recognized by the Icelandic bishops despite the equal character of the spouses and the good alliances it made for their families. Guðmundr dýri, father of Ingibjörg and a powerful chieftain, had been opposed to the marriage from the outset because the bride and groom were relatives, but Þorfinnr had seen this as an excuse for rejecting his proposal. To avoid tension, Guðmundr consented to the wedding. The relationship between the spouses turned out to be good. But the bishop (not named, but probably Brandr Sæmundarson at Hólar) pronounced their subsequent children to be illegitimate (Sts, I, 178). However, it is unclear whether the Bishop's reaction had any effect. On the other hand, it is not known whether there were any children from the marriage.

⁵³ ÞsB chs 23–24.

who is rich but of low status. The identity of the child's father is unknown at this time; Snælaug first says that it was one of her father's labourers. Later the priest Þórðr falls in love with Snælaug and asks her father Hogni for her hand. They marry and are deeply in love. After a time, it is revealed that the father of Snælaug's daughter is really the magnate Hreinn Hermundarson, a relation in the fourth degree with Þórðr. When Þorlákr hears of this he regards the marriage of Snælaug and Þórðr as incestuous.⁵⁴ But the two love each other so much that they do not want to separate. The Bishop then excommunicates them. Hogni and Þórðr mount strong opposition to Þorlákr and make his life difficult. After a long struggle, Þórðr and Snælaug do agree to separate, but cannot manage to stay apart for more than a few months at a time, and they have three sons.

The sources are clear in naming fornication and incest as two key issues in Þorlákr's crusade to improve sexual morals at the end of the twelfth century. Paradoxically, Þorlákr's struggle against fornication and incest meant that the public's ideas of what constituted a good and equal relationship were set in opposition to the Church's new rules for marriage. It is striking how many relationships portrayed as good in the sagas are broken up on the basis of canon law. For Þorlákr, a marriage founded on the old norms of *jafnræði* and social interests may have represented a danger to the individual because such ideas could lead to adultery or incestuous relations.

Attitudes to Þorlákr's struggle for monogamous and exogamous relationships apparently differed. *Oddaverjapáttir* paints a picture of a bishop pursuing a righteous battle for good and right morals. He stands up to powerful opponents on important principles of marriage. It is precisely this zeal that may explain why many came to oppose Þorlákr's strongly principled stance; his principles did not explain to most Icelanders why a good marriage had to be broken up. Women like Ragnheiðr and Jóra were closely related to high-ranking clerics, but seem to have decided for themselves to choose a partner forbidden by canon law. Even in clerical circles, not everyone followed Þorlákr's good example. The priest Þórðr, who was married to Snælaug, was one of Þorlákr's opponents. Þorlákr's nephew and successor, Bishop Páll Jónsson (1195–1211), did not oppose Þorlákr openly, but neither was he particularly interested in confrontations with chieftains in such domestic matters.

The equivocal attitude of many Icelandic clerics in following up Þorlákr's marriage reforms, and the absence of interest (including in Þorlákr) in fighting for the widespread acceptance of *maritalis affectio* and *consensus*, makes it quite unlikely that clerical historians would have had a great interest in using the sagas of Icelanders as propaganda for the Church's doctrine of consent, as some modern historians have argued. Despite this fact, I would suggest that a few clerical saga-writers were influenced by the new doctrine of consent in the period around 1200, but in a slightly different way than Gratian and Peter Lombard would have wished.

⁵⁴ *Prestssaga Guðmundar góða* points out that there were in fact two obstacles for the marriage, presumably because Þórðr also was a priest (Sts, I, 131–32).

The Meaning of Consent in Clerical Historiography

Þorlákr's lack of interest in establishing the doctrine of consent may be explained by a belief on his part that heroic consent was a sufficient form of *consensus*. Þorlákr says nothing about this himself, but we can see through the bishops' sagas and the sagas of the first Christian kings how the clerical milieu conceived the significance of consent in marriage.

Of clerical historiography from the close of the twelfth century, let us first consider Oddr Snorrason's saga of Óláfr Tryggvason, dating to about 1190. It was thus written about the time that Archbishop Eiríkr Ívarsson's letter on the Church's doctrine of consent arrived in Iceland. The monastery where Oddr lived had good contact with Norway and the learned circle around the archbishopric in Niðaróss. Oddr was most probably well informed of continental developments in canon law, including those relating to marriage. Therefore, it is interesting to see how Oddr connects traditional heroic ideals with a conception of a righteous and virtuous prince in the Church's eyes.⁵⁵

In a previous chapter, we saw that Oddr Snorrason used heroic ideals of love to praise Óláfr with worldly honour. But according to Oddr, Óláfr was not involved in any unseemly relationships with women. He marries women he meets on his travels around Europe, and it is always the women who choose him. Oddr lays great emphasis on the principle of equality; this is particularly clear when the wise counsellor Dixin asks to be the one to join Óláfr and Queen Geira in marriage: Dixin says that no woman can get a better husband than Óláfr, and Óláfr is getting a woman who is capable in every respect. Both will obtain great honour from this marriage.⁵⁶ Through the saga, Oddr shows how the woman's acknowledgement of the man at the point of marriage could lead to a good, *jafnræði*, and durable marriage. Consent was not the defining element of a valid marriage; Oddr avoided such an anachronism. Nevertheless, the ideal was for a woman to value her prospective husband before the marriage. Oddr emphasizes heroic criteria and public evaluation of the woman's choice so that consent continues to have a heroic character in the saga. But he also imparts a new value content to heroic consent: Christian values are taken into account as the woman sizes up a suitor. For Oddr the monk, this form of heroic consent could certainly square with canon law's demand for women's consent in marriage.

Oddr was hardly alone in furthering this link between heroic and Christian views of the meaning of consent in the decades around 1200. A similar conception of marriage and the woman's evaluation of the man can be found in the contemporary bishops' sagas. Despite the fact that the continental Church encouraged the ideal of

⁵⁵ Oddr wrote the saga first in Latin for a clerical audience, but it was soon translated into Old Norse, perhaps by Oddr himself. There is of course the possibility of changes from the original in the preserved version, but these are hardly substantial.

⁵⁶ ÓTO, pp. 32–34.

celibacy from the eleventh century onward and determined that married men could no longer hold ecclesiastical posts from about 1120, there is little to indicate that the Icelandic bishops fought to separate marriage from the priesthood. In the period 1056–1237, when Iceland had only native bishops, seven of thirteen bishops were married when they were ordained. None of them put away his wife.⁵⁷

Instead, the marriages of the bishops were portrayed as ideal marriages. In *Ísleifs þáttur byskups*, we read that the first Icelandic bishop, Ísleifr Gizurarson (1056–80), is talked into getting married to improve his position. Heeding his family's advice, he goes to a man named Þorvaldr and asks for his daughter Dalla in marriage. At first Þorvaldr refuses, not because he looks down on Ísleifr, but because he lives so far away. Dalla, who is described as a very beautiful woman, convinces her father to change his mind: 'because I have the ambitious desire to be married to the best man and have the most promising son born in Iceland with him'.⁵⁸ Þorvaldr is obliged to concede: 'your counsel is of no mean importance here'.⁵⁹ Ísleifr was the good man that the beautiful woman chooses. This gives the Bishop great honour in the saga. His marriage with Dalla is accordingly described as very happy; it is begun on the basis of the woman's active will and consent.

As far as other bishops are concerned, the circumstances surrounding courtship and marriage are not described in detail, but the identity of their wives and their domestic relationships do play an important part in character description. Bishop Páll Jónsson was married to Herdís Ketilsdóttir, a woman who was both beautiful and skilful in every way.⁶⁰ She kept the household and farm so well that they did not have to beg to provide for the approximately one hundred people who lived on the farm.⁶¹ A similar wifely ideal is found in the depiction of Steinunn Þorgrímsdóttir, who was

⁵⁷ Jenny M. Jochens, 'The Church and Sexuality in Medieval Iceland', *Journal of Medieval History*, 6 (1980), 377–92 (p. 382); see also Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Age of the Sturlungs*, p. 131. These conditions may not be too different from other European regions; see Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society*, pp. 342–43. Þorlákr never married and may have introduced a prohibition for priests to marry widows; see PsA ch. 5. Only from c. 1240 did bishops and clerics normally remain unmarried; cf. Orri Vésteinsson, *Christianization of Iceland*, pp. 234–37. But clerical celibacy did not, of course, prevent local priests from cohabiting with women they were not married to.

⁵⁸ Íþb, p. 337: 'því at ek hefi þá metnaðargirnð at eiga inn bezta manninn ok inn gófgasta soninn með honum er á Íslandi mun fæðask'.

⁵⁹ Íþb, p. 337: 'Ekki hafa þín ráð lítit mátt hér til'.

⁶⁰ Psb ch. 1: 'vænnar konu ok vel at sér at hvívetna, því er kvennmenn mátti pryða'.

⁶¹ Psb chs 2, 4, 13. *Páls saga* offers a moving scene when Herdís dies in an accident. Páll tries to hide his sorrow as well as he can, but people said that he was in grief for the rest of his life: Psb ch. 13. Parallels to his grief are found elsewhere in Norse sources, especially among skalds such as Egill Skallagrímsson. Páll, however, found comfort not in skaldic performance, but in the love of God.

married to Bishop Gizurr Ísleifsson (1082–1118). According to the bishop's saga *Hungrvaka*, she was responsible for running the farm herself, and in fine style.⁶²

Even Bishop Þorlákr went courting in his youth. After he returned from studying abroad, his family wanted him to improve his standing by marriage.⁶³ Þorlákr is finally convinced to court a widow; all the best matches at that time were widows, the saga explains. He is received with all possible honour, for he is seen as an enterprising man with many resources. A vision keeps Þorlákr from marrying the good widow; in a dream, a man comes to him and says that another, better Bride awaits Þorlákr. After this, he entirely gives up his plans to marry. Nevertheless, the saga emphasizes that he and the widow (who was still one of the best matches in Iceland) remain friends the rest of their lives. *Þorláks saga* is not negative towards marriage in itself. The saga introduces the ideal of celibacy very carefully through Þorlákr's vision; the reader gets the impression that the Bishop gave up marrying because he wants to live an especially pure life, not because all priests are supposed to live without wives. Marriage continued to be an important element in establishing bishops' social status in Iceland.

Jóns saga helga tells that Jón (1106–21) was ashamed before the pope because he had been married twice. But Jón confesses all to the pope. That he admits his marital status to the pope himself shows that he has nothing to hide and that he keeps holy matrimony according to God's law. According to the saga, even the pope seems to consider the rules of celibacy rather on the strict side, particularly with respect to Jón, who is such a worthy man for the office in all respects. The saga also points out that Jón was childless, and indicates that he lived chastely with both wives.⁶⁴ Stephan Kuttner notes that it is unlikely that a bishop at the beginning of the twelfth century would have to go all the way to Rome for a dispensation for these relationships.⁶⁵ It is more likely that the author of *Jóns saga*, caught between Þorlákr's clampdown on priestly marriage and the canonization of Jón, which made his marriages problematic, defended Jón's two marriages purely because he had been such an exemplary husband.

These portrayals of wives give an idea of why the idea of celibacy only slowly caught on in Iceland. While the Church organization grew in the towns of Norway in the twelfth century by establishing cathedral cities around the bishops, the bishops' incomes in Iceland were inextricably connected to the bishops' farms. More than fines and tithes, the management of the farms served as a basis for Icelandic bishops' incomes in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Running the bishop's farm on the scale that Ísleifr, Gizurr, and Páll did required a large household, directed by a wife.⁶⁶

⁶² Hv ch. 4.

⁶³ ÞsA ch. 5.

⁶⁴ Jsh (S) ch. 5.

⁶⁵ Stephan Kuttner, 'St. Jón of Hólar: Canon Law and Hagiography in Medieval Iceland', *Analecta Cracoviensia*, 7 (1975), 367–75.

⁶⁶ The celibate Þorlákr was the exception rather than the rule before c. 1240. The message of *Þorláks saga* seems to be that marriage was not necessary to bishops in order to confirm

I believe this is also part of the reason clerics took hold of the *heroic* idea of consent; they tried to win respect from a traditional discourse on men's honour as it related to love and marriage. In this context, it is not insignificant that Archbishop Eiríkr's letter of 1189 also forbids clerics to bear arms or take part in lawsuits. Both were characteristic of the rights of a free man in Iceland. The clerical saga-writers might therefore have wanted to at least use ideas about women's heroic consent as an acknowledgement of the bishops' manhood. In *Hungrvaka*, Bishop Ísleifr is described as the friendliest, handsomest, most upright and well-disposed man in Iceland.⁶⁷ Even though Ísleifr is certainly no warrior, the fact that Dalla chooses the Bishop means that these marriages were idealized. On the other hand, Dalla's and Ísleifr's excellent son Bishop Gizurr is portrayed as good warrior material in the same saga; he is 'outstanding in everything that was proper for a man'.⁶⁸ He is also called one of the best men among both learned and unlearned who ever lived in Iceland. It is clearly the saga writer's intention to portray Gizurr as equal to the best of the chieftains, but who *nevertheless* chose the path of the Church. Bishops Magnús Einarsson (1134–48) and Klængr Þorsteinsson (1152–76) are also praised as fulsomely by the saga author.⁶⁹ Their qualities as magnates are dwelt upon, but more important than 'warrior' qualities is their ability to build churches, create peace, be experts in the law and self-sacrificing, and — not least — that they have an attractive appearance. A striking example of the emphasis on physical beauty is found in the description of Bishop Jón Ögmundarson. Along with the conventional spiritual qualities (benevolence, mercy, and self-effacing generosity), he was physically distinguished from other men: 'St Jón was great in stature, most beautiful, very proficient, with bright eyes and blond hair, strong-limbed and with a most seemly appearance.'⁷⁰

While *Sturlunga saga* shows the need for the woman's acknowledgement in marriage through the description of marriage partners who do not get along and eventually divorce, Oddr Snorrason and a few of the writers of the bishops' sagas connect the woman's consent with the phase before marriage. This indicates that higher clerics did not see the traditional and canonical understandings of consent in opposition to each other, but as a difference in scale. Consent is neither an *adequate* nor a *necessary* criterion for a valid marriage in the clerics' sagas, but a woman's will to marry serves as a foundation for a good and stable marriage, a sort of *maritalis affectio*. It was an adequate alternative to the canonical understanding of *consensus* until it ceased to be a matter of principle for zealous reform-minded clerics in Iceland.

their social position; to be married to the Church and Christ was even better in the eyes of God. To an Icelandic audience this rhetoric might have made sense.

⁶⁷ Hv ch. 2.

⁶⁸ Hv ch. 4: 'algörr at sér um alla hluti þá er karlmaðr átti at sér at hafa'.

⁶⁹ Hv chs 8, 9–10.

⁷⁰ Jsh (S) ch. 3(2): 'Inn helgi Jón var mikill maðr vexti, manna vænstr ok liðmannligastr, eygðr manna bezt, bleikr á hár ok sterkr at afli ok inn þekkiligsti í öllu yfirbragði.'

The Idea of Consent According to Snorri

For a sample of aristocratic historiography, we will take a closer look at Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla*.⁷¹ Like most ageing Icelandic magnates, Snorri was deeply involved in the planning of marriages for himself and his children. Did he place women's consent to marriage in a heroic or canonical context? Did he regard women's right of participation in the arrangement of their marriages as an explicitly Christian phenomenon? Was women's consent qualitatively different before and after the conversion?

To begin at the beginning: in *Ynglinga saga* women seem to be pawns in the power struggles of men. Beautiful women are frequently abducted by warrior kings, often as a proof of a king's power over other leaders. An example is King Agni Dagsson, who goes raiding in Finland. The Finns put up stiff resistance under their leader Frosti, but King Agni manages to defeat him in the end. Agni takes an enormous quantity of booty, including Skjálfr, Frosti's daughter.⁷² King Guðrøðr Hálfðanarson is refused when he courts Ása, daughter of King Haraldr inn granrauði in Agðir. In reply to the refusal, he takes his army to Agðir, kills King Haraldr and takes Ása home with him.⁷³ The beautiful Yrsa has the dubious honour of being abducted by two kings, first King Aðils Óttarsson and afterward King Helgi Hálfðanarson; the latter was her biological father who did not recognize her.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Historians have discussed whether or not Snorri's *Heimskringla* favours the consent of women. Jenny Jochens argued that Snorri promoted the new doctrine of consensual marriage. She assumed that consent was important only after the conversion; see Jenny M. Jochens 'Consent in Marriage: Old Norse Law, Life, and Literature', *Scandinavian Studies*, 58 (1986), 142–76 (pp. 151–58); Jochens, "'Með Jákvaði Hennar Sjálfrar': Consent as Signifier in the Old Norse World", in *Consent and Coercion*, ed. by Laiou, pp. 271–89 (pp. 280–81); Jochens, *Women*, pp. 48–49. Birgit Sawyer, on the other hand, has pointed out that a woman's voice in marital affairs was not given much emphasis by her male relatives. She thus argues that Snorri knew the doctrine on consent, but opposed it by silencing the women in *Heimskringla*; see Birgit Sawyer and Peter Sawyer, *Medieval Scandinavia: From Conversion to Reformation circa 800–1500*, The Nordic Series, 17 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 176. Sverre Bagge has opposed Jochens's point of view by arguing that women after the conversion are not depicted as more influential in marital affairs than in heathen times. This trait is seen less as the literary or ideological work of Snorri himself, as Sawyer argues, but caused by the changed focus on politics from the institution of the household, where women often had a certain influence, to the court, where the opinion of women became marginalized; see Sverre Bagge, 'Mann og kvinne i *Heimskringla*', in *Fokus på kvinner i middelalderkilder*, ed. by Berit J. Sellevold, E. Mundal, and Gro Steinsland (Skara: Viktoria, 1992), pp. 8–31.

⁷² Hkr:Ys ch. 19.

⁷³ Hkr:Ys ch. 48.

⁷⁴ Hkr:Ys chs 28–29.

Nevertheless, a woman's right to heroic consent is not absent. For Snorri, it was essential to show women's opinions of their kidnappers, not so much in words as in their actions. Both Agni and Guðrøðr are killed by the women they take. Yrsa leaves Helgi when she finds out he is her father and returns to her first kidnapper, King Aðils, of her own free will. She remains with him as queen the rest of her life. Drífa Snjásdóttir, Queen of Finland, becomes so angry with the Yngling king Vanlandi Sveigðisson because he leaves her that she employs Hulð the sorceress to either make him come back to Finland by magic or else kill him.⁷⁵ The best example of heroic consent in *Ynglinga saga*, however, is Queen Bera's conduct in her marriage to King Álfir Alreksson. While King Álfir is characterized as taciturn, imperious, and unfriendly, Snorri describes Bera as 'most beautiful, proud and cheerful'.⁷⁶ In other words, this was not a good or *jafnræði* marriage. Instead, Snorri clearly implies that Bera is better suited to Álfir's brother Yngvi. He, after all, is 'a great warrior and always victorious, handsome, excelling in games, strong and the bravest in battle, generous and most cheerful'.⁷⁷ It comes as no great surprise, then, when Yngvi and Bera hit it off; they sit up late talking and drinking every evening, while Álfir goes early to bed. Álfir tells Bera she should come earlier to bed, as he is tired of waiting for her every night. She replies that 'that woman would be happy who had Yngvi as her husband and not Álfir'.⁷⁸ Álfir is angered by her words; nor does it help the situation that she repeats this night after night. The story ends with Álfir coming in one night when Bera and Yngvi are sitting up drinking, and running his brother through with his sword. Before Yngvi falls dead, he deals his brother a death blow. Here, the cause of the tragedy is that Bera has the wrong husband. The blame is not laid on Bera or Yngvi, but on the mechanisms at work when spouses are too different.

Later in pagan times, as well, Snorri gives the impression that a woman's will is decisive for her husband's honour and for the durability of the marriage. In *Haralds saga ins hárfagra* we encounter the famous Gyða Eiríksdóttir, who refuses to become the concubine of a petty king. However, she does promise to become his *eiginkona*, his lawful wife, if he can manage to conquer the whole country.⁷⁹ When Haraldr hárfagri has succeeded in this, Snorri succinctly notes that his men went and brought her to him.⁸⁰ Yet again, we have an example of a woman making demands with regard to a man's warlike qualities and social position; when events demonstrate that Haraldr possesses these qualities, Gyða's further consent was unimportant to Snorri. Sigríðr stórráða has similarly high requirements for her suitors, a fact that hits petty

⁷⁵ Hkr:Ys ch. 13.

⁷⁶ Hkr:Ys ch. 21: 'kvinna fríðust ok skörungr mikill, gleðimaðr inn mesti'.

⁷⁷ Hkr:Ys ch. 21: 'hermaðr mikill ok allsigrsæll, fríðr ok íþróttamaðr inn mesti, sterkur ok inn snarpasti í orrostum, mildr af fé ok gleðimaðr mikill'.

⁷⁸ Hkr:Ys ch. 21: 'at sú kona væri sæl, er heldr skyldi eiga Yngva en Álf'.

⁷⁹ Hkr:Hshá ch. 3.

⁸⁰ Hkr:Hshá ch. 20.

king Haraldr grenski rather hard. According to Snorri, Sigríðr thinks the wife Haraldr already has is good enough for him. In this instance, Haraldr has no room for improvement. Sigríðr makes it clear to Haraldr that his destiny is to be a petty king. She is quite happy where she is and needs neither him nor his kingdom in Norway.⁸¹

Did consent become more 'Christian' after the conversion? In Snorri's sagas of Óláfr Tryggvason and Óláfr Haraldsson, women's will plays an important role in both kings' marriages. In the saga of the first Christian king, Óláfr Tryggvason, Snorri uses Oddr Snorrason's account of the queens that choose him. In a few cases, he develops a woman's role in the process leading up to marriage.⁸² In the saga of Óláfr Haraldsson, we remember that Snorri used depictions of heroic love when the Swedish princesses Ingigerðr and Ástriðr wanted to marry the Norwegian king. Through Ingigerðr's acknowledgement and ability to choose, Snorri aims to disarm the tradition that Óláfr sænski ('the Swedish') thought King Óláfr not good enough for Ingigerðr. The illegitimate Ástriðr, who in *Heimskringla* is depicted as just as distinguished as her half-sister Ingigerðr, was very keen to marry the Norwegian king, despite her father's (unjustified) dislike.⁸³ In this situation, the position of consent is similar to that in Oddr Snorrason's saga of Óláfr Tryggvason: women choose the Christian hero-king because he is the best in every way. The *giptingarmaðr* refuses his daughters a good and *jafnræði* marriage, and the women's defiance of their father is legitimized.

After Óláfr Tryggvason's time, it is more common for princesses not to want to marry the man chosen for them; it seems candidates are not good enough. This is a logical argument within the heroic tradition, but one the Norwegian kings tried to break with, at least according to *Heimskringla*. A good example is Óláfr Tryggvason's marriage plans for his sister Ástriðr. Óláfr wants to marry Ástriðr to the powerful Erlingr Skjálgsson in return for submission and help in Christianizing the magnates of Vestland. Ástriðr herself is not enthusiastic about being used as a bargaining chip, not because the marriage is arranged, but because Erlingr has no title.⁸⁴ The King takes a hawk belonging to Ástriðr and plucks out all its feathers. Ástriðr understands the threat from her brother and allows him to arrange the marriage. At the same time, Óláfr understands his sister's hesitation, and assures her that he can confer a title on any man in his kingdom. Thus Erlingr Skjálgsson becomes Óláfr's foremost landed man. Snorri believes that Ástriðr is too concerned with Erlingr's lack of a formal title. Óláfr Tryggvason sees, more clearly, that Erlingr is the best match for her in the land, in addition to the marriage having an important social and political purpose. That Erlingr gets a title is, for Óláfr (and Snorri), only a confirmation of his good qualities; he is second only to Óláfr in strength and courage, says

⁸¹ Hkr:ÓsT ch. 43.

⁸² Hkr:ÓsT chs 22, 32.

⁸³ Hkr:Ósh chs 91–92.

⁸⁴ Hkr:ÓsT ch. 56.

Snorri. Here, the ‘objective’ criteria bear out Óláfr’s evaluation rather than Ástriðr’s doubt. But we should note that Ástriðr is not, strictly speaking, married against her will; after all, she does get the titled husband she wants. But it is an impersonal choice for which relatively many with a good enough title could have qualified.

The same sense of balance between women’s consent and their demand for a husband with honour is also found in Ragnhildr Magnúsdóttir’s refusal of magnate Hákon Ívarsson. King Haraldr harðráði wants Hákon to submit to him, but Hákon demands Ragnhildr, daughter of King Magnús góði, in return. Haraldr says that Hákon can talk to Ragnhildr himself: ‘You, Hákon, must talk about this with Ragnhildr, and see if she will consent to this proposal. But it is not advisable for you nor anybody else to get Ragnhildr if she does not consent to it.’⁸⁵ As a king’s daughter, Ragnhildr does not want to marry a ‘farmer’ of low station however handsome and accomplished he might be. Hákon does not become an earl until some time later, and the wedding takes place without any comment on the bride’s opinion in the matter. Thus, Snorri implies that Ragnhildr has no objections to her suitor this time.

Heimskringla does not portray women as having a greater say in the arrangement of their marriages after Christianization. A woman’s will in marriage is put in the context of traditional attitudes on heroic consent. The change from ancient to later times lies mainly in the fact that certain women of royal rank were sceptical of marrying beneath themselves. In pre-Christian times, concubines or daughters of ‘common’ men could become the mothers of kings. It was only natural for women to give in to powerful men. After Christianization, it is more common for women to express reluctance to marrying beneath themselves socially. Snorri may have wanted to explain the development of the practice of marrying king’s daughters and sisters to commoners. For Snorri, it was important to show that marital relations between women of royal stock and men from the aristocracy could be *jafnræði*.

After Christianization, women’s heroic consent was more often subordinated to the need to create peace and alliances within national borders. The ideal of creating political peace through marriage is perhaps most clearly expressed in Magnús berfœtrr’s marriage to the Swedish princess Margrét Ingadóttir. She is given the by-name *friðkolla*, ‘peace-girl’, as a sign of the two kings’ new alliance.⁸⁶ For Snorri, consent was less a matter of canon law than a concept handed down from older traditions, a concept that he had to consider in his depictions of marriages in former times.

⁸⁵ Hkr:Hsh ch. 48: “Skaltu, Hákon,” segir konungr, “tala mál þetta við Ragnhildi, hvárt hon vil samþykkja þetta ráð. En eigi er þér ok engum öðrum at ráðanda at fá Ragnhildar, svá at eigi sé hennar samþykki við”; cf. HÍ, p. 16: ‘kalladi Hakoni þat of rad ok huerium annara at fa hennar utan hennar uilia bad hann þa Hakon ganga til sialfan ok tala med hana’. The episode is omitted in *Fagrskinna*, but in *Morkinskinna* it is the king who talks with Ragnhildr on behalf of Hákon; see Msk, pp. 217–19 (ch. 42).

⁸⁶ Hkr:Msb ch. 15.

The Use of Consensus in Norway

My argument thus far has been that Icelandic historiographers — both ecclesiastical and secular — were most concerned with the heroic conception of consent. Did the canonical definition of consent gain ground more readily in Norway, where the Church organization was stronger? In other European countries, the king's desire to decide for himself in marital matters was often in sharp conflict with the Church's demand for a new standard of morality in marriage. For a Church led by a pope trying to manifest his power in relation to that of kings, the marriages, divorces, and mistress-taking of kings provided a golden opportunity for the long arm of canon law to stretch right into the royal bedchamber.⁸⁷ What were the aims of Archbishop Eysteinn, the most noted Church politician of the period? How did the Norwegian royal family and Norwegian aristocrats receive the doctrine of consent?

In contrast to Iceland, in Norway the doctrine of consent was quickly incorporated into the laws. In the Christian law section of *Frostapingslög*, probably edited by Archbishop Eysteinn, the woman's consent is required as a basis for a valid marriage:

Nu ef maðr vil dottor gipta eða þa kono er hann a forræðe a af lagum, hann skal taka vatta ii með ser af hins hendi er fa uil oc fretta at ef hon vili þui umræðe fylgia er sa leggr firir hana er þa a forræde hennar at lagum. En ef hon suarar ual eða þegir þa se þui skirskotat oc se kona fest at þui. En ef hon nei kuæðr þa se hon eigi fest. (F III 22)

If a man will give his daughter in marriage or a woman he according to law has the right to give in marriage, he shall take with him two witnesses from the side of him that will have her, and ask her whether she will follow the counsel that he as her legal guardian lay before her. And if she answers well or is silent, then the case will be settled and the women will by this be betrothed. But if she says no, then she will not be betrothed.

Note that the woman's agreement has its limits. Firstly, her silence is interpreted as an affirmative answer. Secondly, the woman only has the opportunity of giving her consent to the match her *giptingarmaðr* puts before her. Eysteinn's revision of the law regarding how a man should seek a wife builds on older practice: the *giptingarmaðr* is said to have the first right to choose a suitable husband. The same point is made in the Christian section of *Eiðsivapingslög*: 'if a man wants to get married, then he shall try to obtain the consent of those relatives that are guardians according

⁸⁷ One example is the excommunication of Philip I in 1094 because he had married a close relative; see Duby, *The Knight*, pp. 3–6. The Danish king Svend Estridsen had married a relative some years earlier, and the archbishop strongly urged him to separate from her. After threats from the pope he had to send her home. However, he continued to live with several women but often without marrying them; see Adam of Bremen, *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*, ed. by Bernhard Schmeidler, *Scriptores rerum Germanicum*, 2 (Hannover: Hahn, 1917), book III, ch. 12; cf. Thyra Nors, 'Kampen om ægteskabet: En konfliktfyldt historie om kirkens forsøg på at genne lægfolk ind i den hellige ægtestand', *Den jyske historiker*, 42 (1987), 28–46 (pp. 28–29).

to the right laws. And then he shall seek her will.’⁸⁸ This attitude also characterizes the letter mentioned above which Archbishop Eiríkr Ívarsson sent to Iceland in 1189. In the letter he emphasizes a woman’s right to give her consent, simultaneously holding the opinion that her kinsman usually had a better idea of what was best for her.⁸⁹ This is a good illustration of how high-ranking clerics applied a principle of canon law to prevailing tradition.

The other new point in the Church’s legislation on marriage — closely connected to the role of consent in betrothal — was the indissolubility of marriage. In theory, it became impossible to get a divorce, but if one of the partners had not consented to the marriage in the first place, or if they proved to be related, the marriage could be regarded as invalid. In the Christian law section of *Eiðsivabingslög*, we read:

Hiunskapr sa er mæinlaus er saman komen, at guðs lagum rettom, oc at uilia huarstuæggia þeirra er saman ero komen, oc annara frennda, þat skal huarke skilia karl ne kona, þo at brœyting gange a skaplyndi þeirra. En þo at hiun sægi skilit millim sin, þa ma huarke þeirra ser til forræðe læita, baðom þeim lifandom, huarke at guðs lagum, ne manna. (E 22)

That marriage which is joined without flaws after God’s right law and after the will of both of those who are joined, and of other relatives, shall be sundered neither by man nor woman, even though they may change their minds. And even though the spouses declare themselves divorced, neither of them may seek marriage while both live, either according to law of God or to the law of men.

This provision shows that even if spouses parted from each other and entered new relationships, due to mutual consent the first marriage had created an indissoluble bond between the man and the woman. This is completely in accordance with contemporary canon law.⁹⁰ What is special about E 22 is the mention of a change of

⁸⁸ E 22: ‘En ef maðr uill ser kuænfangs læita þa skal han raðs læita uið frenðr þeirar er skyldazster ero til forræða at lagum rettom. En þui nest skal han læita hænnar uilia.’

⁸⁹ DI, I, no. 71, p. 287: ‘En vm fastnadar mal, þegar maðr fastnar sier konu med jaquede hennar sialfrar, og er samþycktt af nalægd og eigi af okomnv þa er þat fast svo sem fullr hiuskapur ef vottar vitv. Nv fullnast þetta at gudz logum. En þo er hitt bodit at þat skal giora med frænda rade. En þo at því bregdenockut, þa er þat fullt þegar vitne fæst, af samþycki. En alt þat er ver lærder menn mecgvm draga til þess, at farrad frænda se á giptingvm kvenna, þa er betra til þess at draga, þvíat optast er þat, at þeir sia betur firir, en þær sialfrar’ (On betrothals; as soon as a man betroths a woman with her own ‘yes’, and the consent was given in presence, and not in absence, then it is as firm as a full marriage if witnessed by witnesses. Now this is fulfilled with the law of God. But it is to be commended that this should be done with the counsel of relatives. But even if it [the betrothal] deviates somehow from this, it is still fulfilled as long as witnesses confirm it was done by consent. But all learned men should encourage strongly that the relatives supervise the marriage of women. It is best to promote this, since they [the relatives] most often know better than [the women] themselves).

⁹⁰ This is also found in the Christian section of *Frostabingslög*, probably revised by Archbishop Eysteinn in the 1170s; cf. F III 10.

mind as a potential reason for divorce. The wider context of the provision shows that both men and women were attributed with the ability to change their minds within a short period of time. Therefore it also says that if the woman is married off without her consent, she must declare this within twelve months. If it is only declared later, she cannot dissolve the marriage.⁹¹ Her silence is then interpreted as an adequate consent. The rhetoric in these provisions is derived from canon law, but seems still to have been influenced by the heroic idea of consent, where a change in the woman's mind after entering the marriage could cause a divorce.

One sign that clerics still acknowledged traditional forms of arranging a marriage is the emphasis that only children born in a marriage where the woman was bought with *mundr* (a bride-price) could inherit. The only exception was if the child was born after the betrothal, but then the *mundr* was already transferred.⁹² This indicates that the verbal agreement, with a form of *verba de futuro*, had become more meaningful in the eyes of the Church. Tore Iversen, who has researched the provincial laws especially with regard to acknowledgement of marriages of the unfree, thinks that *Frostapingsløg* operates on the understanding of marriage according to two separate plans, one on a spiritual level and one on the financial-legal. *Frostapingsløg* ignores the opposition between the traditional demand for *mundr* and the idea that an indissoluble and sacramental union begins with consent. Iversen believes that this is partly because the question of marriage among the unfree was as yet unresolved for contemporary theologians, and partly because a marriage without financial-legal consequences was regarded as an artificial arrangement.⁹³

In practice, then, marriage remained the jurisdiction of 'common law', even though new canonical regulations on fornication, incest, consent, and the indissolubility of marriage were introduced gradually. In the period from the establishment of the first archbishopric to the beginning of the thirteenth century, it was far from clear whose rules counted the most. The Church and Crown battled for jurisdiction of marital matters. New rules introduced from the continent had a tendency to be simply added onto older laws, so that jurisprudence was strongly dependent on the will of the parties in individual cases to follow and interpret old and new laws. What we can see in the provincial laws is that consent was emphasized in Christian law only to such a degree that it did not pose a threat to the status quo. A woman's consent was seen as the last chance of an appeal before the betrothal was effected.

The provisions in Christian laws do not appear to be the result of practical problems in the everyday life of ordinary people, but to have been introductions from central seats of learning around the papal see which had to be adapted into older law. For example, there was as yet no declaration concerning secret marriage, which was

⁹¹ E 23.

⁹² F III 13.

⁹³ Tore Iversen, *Trelldommen: Norsk slaveri i middelalderen*, Skrifter fra Historisk institutt, Universitetet i Bergen, 1 (Bergen: Department of History, University of Bergen, 1997), p. 206.

beginning to be a problem on the continent. The Christian laws are more concerned with defining what ‘incest’ and ‘fornication’ involved than defining in crystal-clear terms whether it was *mundr* or *consensus* that made a marriage valid. This follows Archbishop Eysteinn’s desire to adapt canonical requirements to fit the realities of his own society.⁹⁴ How these rather unclear provisions were received and used is crucial for understanding the changes and continuity in attitudes to women’s will and what marriage involved.

In the eleventh century, there were few conflicts between the Church’s norms on marriage and the practice of the secular aristocracy. King Óláfr Haraldsson had mistresses in addition to his wife Ástríðr; one of them bore his successor Magnús góði. Haraldr harðráði had his conflicts with the Archbishop of Bremen, but that was not because of his relationships with women.⁹⁵ These conflicts were more probably caused by Haraldr’s ignoring the pope and Archbishop when they forbade him to name his own bishops, and confiscating pilgrims’ offerings to St Óláfr’s shrine in Niðaróss.⁹⁶

It is at the beginning of the twelfth century that sources testify to a struggle between the Church and the secular aristocracy regarding marital practice. The first king to bear the brunt of this was Sigurðr jórsalafari (1103–30). He is portrayed in a number of sagas as a scoundrel in his relationships with women. Snorri tells a not-so-flattering tale of how he made Borghildr Óláfsdóttir, a beautiful, wise, and intelligent chieftain’s daughter, his concubine in 1115, and their son was the later King Magnús blindi (1130–35).⁹⁷

In *Morkinskinna* we are told of Sigurðr’s aversion for his Danish queen Málmfriðr Haraldsdóttir. He wants to divorce her and marry a certain Cecilía.⁹⁸ When Bishop Magni hears that the King is preparing for a wedding in Bergen, he reminds the King that it is against God’s law to marry again while his first wife is living. Bishop Magni eventually gives his permission for the marriage, but requires Sigurðr to pay huge fines to the Church. Sigurðr lives with Cecilía in great affection, but he soon becomes seriously ill, and his friends and Cecilía interpret this as God’s punishment for the marriage. His triumph over the Church is, according to *Morkinskinna*, short-lived.

In the Church’s eyes, Magnús blindi was hardly better than his father. In about 1130 he married Kristín Knútsdóttir, a sister of King Valdemar of Denmark. If we are to believe Snorri, [he] never came to love her and sent her back to Denmark’. For Magnús, however, it was not the Church that was his foremost opponent after the divorce; the problem was that he gained powerful enemies among her kin. Afterwards,

⁹⁴ Helle, *Norge blir en stat*, p. 65; Gunnes, *Erkebiskop Øystein*, pp. 170–71.

⁹⁵ Haraldr was later accused of being a bigamist; see Gustav Storm, ‘Harald Haardraades paastaaede Dobbelgiftte’, *Historisk Tidsskrift*, 3rd series, 3 (1895), 424–29.

⁹⁶ Adam of Bremen, *Gesta Hammaburgensis*, book III, ch. 17.

⁹⁷ Hkr:Mss ch. 19.

⁹⁸ Msk, pp. 398–400.

everything was more difficult for him.⁹⁹ Magnús's rival for the Norwegian throne, Haraldr gilli, was himself a ladies' man; he was killed in his lover's arms in 1136.

With the establishment of the archbishopric in 1152/53, Snorri writes that Cardinal Nicholas Breakspear worked hard to improve morals in Norway, especially the king's morals. He was especially displeased with Eysteinn Haraldsson and Sigurðr munnr. Eysteinn's sin was apparently that he harried England just as in the past.¹⁰⁰ Sigurðr munnr, for his part, was known as a lover of women with many illegitimate children. The worst aspect for Breakspear must have been Sigurðr's relationship to his first cousin Kristín, daughter of Sigurðr jórsalafari.¹⁰¹ But backed by the pope's authority, the Cardinal had sufficient means of pressuring Sigurðr into coming to terms with him, a sign that by the middle of the twelfth century the Church was beginning to attain stronger means of exerting power over the Crown than just the threat of God's punishment.¹⁰²

Breakspear's morality programme was continued by Archbishop Eysteinn. But in practice, the Archbishop could also wink at moral weaknesses in his allies. The Archbishop had no problem working with Erlingr skakki, who had four illegitimate sons with three different women.¹⁰³ For Eysteinn, the alliance with Erlingr was certainly a give-and-take relationship. Despite all this, the new law of royal succession was adopted early in his career as Archbishop. The law stipulated that the eldest legitimate son would inherit the kingdom, a measure that could lead to increased respect for marriage in relation to other domestic arrangements.

If we look specifically for an interest in following the new doctrine of consent in practice, it mostly appears to be absent. Kristín Sigurðardóttir was not willingly married off to Erlingr skakki, and the relationship between the spouses was hardly of the best. Kristín left her husband several years later and went to Miklagarðr with the otherwise unknown Grímr rusli.¹⁰⁴ King Sverrir did not take women's right to consent much into account when in 1184 he let his warriors take his fallen adversaries' widows.¹⁰⁵ But after 1184, it seems that Sverrir was careful to adhere to the Church's

⁹⁹ Hkr:MsbHg ch. 1: 'Magnús varð henni ekki unnandi ok sendi hana aptr suðr til Danmerkr, ok gekk honum allt síðan þyngra. Fekk hann óþokka mikinn af frændum hennar.'

¹⁰⁰ Gunnes, *Erkebiskop Øystein*, pp. 60, 133; Inger Ekrem, 'Essay on Date and Purpose', in *Historia Norwegie*, ed. by Inger Ekrem and Lars Boje Mortensen, trans. by Peter Fisher (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2003), pp. 155–225 (pp. 164–66).

¹⁰¹ That must have been just before or just after Kristín Sigurðardóttir married Erlingr skakki. The affair between Kristín and Sigurðr munnr produced a son, Haraldr, who later was hanged by the men of Erlingr skakki and Magnús Erlingsson c. 1172: Hkr:MsE ch. 35; cf. Svs ch. 60.

¹⁰² Hkr:Mss ch. 23.

¹⁰³ Hkr:MsE ch. 30.

¹⁰⁴ Hkr:MsE ch. 30.

¹⁰⁵ Svs ch. 100.

marital norms, perhaps to show that he had better morals than Erlingr skakki and Magnús Erlingsson, the latter of whom *Sverris saga* paints as quite a man for the ladies. Sverrir himself was accused by his opponents of being a bigamist. They told the papal emissaries that Sverrir ‘had taken a wife even though he had one before that he was legally married to, and they both lived’.¹⁰⁶ But Sverrir retorted that priests were known for their unchaste lives.¹⁰⁷ For Sverrir, it was important to present himself as the moral watchdog to justify his struggle with the Church, even though his respect for marriage and consent can be interpreted as strategic and superficial rather than an internalized norm.

One marriage case in Sverrir’s time, however, made the doctrine of consent a burning issue in the Norwegian consciousness. Cecilía Sigurðardóttir, half-sister of Sverrir, had been married to the Swedish law-speaker Fólkvíðr in the 1170s. In the early 1180s she left Fólkvíðr and went to her brother Sverrir, who had since won dominion in Norway. Some years later the magnate Bárðr Guthormsson asked for her hand, and Sverrir gave his consent. Then Archbishop Eysteinn jumped in and said she could not marry again while Fólkvíðr was alive. Sverrir called many magnates and archbishops to a meeting to debate the matter. But it was Cecilía who was the leading figure at the meeting, and she argued well for her case. She first wanted to know if Eysteinn really thought that she should not marry the man her kinsmen recommended. Eysteinn parried by asking, was she not already married? He believed her question was a moot point, and he bade her go back to her husband in Vermland. Cecilía then had to confess that she had never been in a valid marriage with Fólkvíðr. She said that her brother’s enemies, Erlingr skakki and Magnús Erlingsson, had married her off to Fólkvíðr against her will and consent. Cecilía thus argued that Christian law had been broken, and that she could not be considered married to Fólkvíðr. The Archbishop then gave his permission, reluctantly it seems, for her to marry Bárðr.¹⁰⁸ As the relationship is portrayed in *Böglunga sögur*, consent was not the most important element in Eysteinn’s marital politics. After all, he had been

¹⁰⁶ SvS ch. 122: ‘Oc þat annat at hann hefði tekit eiginconu oc hefði aþr aðra þa er hann hafði logfengit oc lifðu þa baðar’. This suggests that Sverrir had had a wife or rather a concubine in the Faeroe Islands. After all, he was twenty-five years old before he went to Norway, and being a priest was no hindrance to marriage in the middle of the twelfth century. *Böglunga sögur* mentions a certain Erlingr who came to Norway from the Faeroes c. 1210 and claimed to be Sverrir’s son (Bgls, pp. 121–22). His mother’s name was Ástríðr, daughter of Hrói. It is tempting to think this was the daughter of Bishop Hrói, in whose household Sverrir lived from the age of five until his departure to Norway, but this is of course impossible to prove. Alternatively, the accusation of bigamy may point to the fact that Sverrir was a priest, and thus already ‘married’ to the Church before marrying Margrét. This seems less likely as the wording is ‘they both still lived’. Rather, it may have been a concubine that later could be perceived as a wife.

¹⁰⁷ SvR, p. 3.

¹⁰⁸ Bgls, pp. 26–28.

Erlingr skakki's mainstay and may have known about the circumstances of Cecilia's first marriage. Cecilia thus managed to beat the Archbishop by using canon law.

How genuine were Cecilia's attempts to live in accordance with canon law? That in 1184 she was already familiar with the doctrine of consent is striking in itself. But even more impressive is her ability to use it in practice to promote her own interests. However, this account should not be taken entirely at face value; *Boglunga sǫgur* may have exaggerated her independent role at the meeting.¹⁰⁹ Nevertheless we cannot rule out the possibility that Sverrir used his background as a priest and his close contact with clerics to put arguments in Cecilia's mouth. In any case, the context of Cecilia's argumentation in *Boglunga sǫgur* is just as closely connected to the heroic as to the canonical understanding of consent. *Boglunga sǫgur* says that Cecilia left Fólkviðr because she 'loved' him little.¹¹⁰ That she wanted to marry Bárðr instead, as her *giptingarmaðr* Sverrir wished, also fits within traditional modes of thought. Thus, Cecilia does not represent a nascent women's movement or an individualism bent on free choice of one's marriage partner. In *Boglunga sǫgur*, Cecilia's *consensus* meant the freedom to marry sensibly and in accordance with the advice of family.

After Cecilia's death, the question of whom she had *really* been married to took on great political significance. At the election of the king at the Eyrarþing in 1204, Ingi, son of Cecilia and Bárðr, received support from Archbishop Eiríkr Ivarsson and the farmers of Trøndelag, first and foremost because Eiríkr and Ingi were good friends, and the farmers wanted a king who grew up in Trøndelag rather than the son of a Swede. Hákon galinn, son of Cecilia and Fólkviðr, was promoted to earl, but was far from pleased with this. In 1210, the Church had to reassess Cecilia's relationship with Fólkviðr and Bárðr. Hákon galinn wanted the kingship and called Ingi Bárðarson a bastard.¹¹¹ Ingi referred to Archbishop Eysteinn's permission for marriage from the 1180s, but Hákon's supporters, who included many bishops, stood their ground. The result was a compromise: the first legitimate son of either Ingi Bárðarson or Hákon galinn would be king after their deaths. That there was still no consensus on which of Cecilia's marriages was valid indicates that the clerics were still in doubt as to the meaning of the doctrine of consent at the beginning of the thirteenth century. The case must have landed like a hot potato in the lap of Archbishop Þórir (1206–14) since so much was at stake and so much was unclear. (*Boglunga sǫgur*'s version of the meeting between Cecilia and Archbishop Eysteinn may have been only one of many circulating in 1210, and been chosen by the pro-Ingi author.) What we should note is how canonical rules regarding marriage and

¹⁰⁹ Hans Jacob Orning, 'Fra egging til degging? Kvinner i saga og samfunn i norsk høymiddelalder', *Middelalderforum*, 2 (1997), 36–48 (p. 41).

¹¹⁰ Bgls, p. 26: 'þi hun unte hannem icke vel'.

¹¹¹ Bgls, p. 124.

consent were used in the political game of royal power around the beginning of the thirteenth century.¹¹²

Boglunga sögur also gives an example of the use — or in this case, the misuse — of the doctrine of consent. Kristín Sverrisdóttir was asked by Bishop Nikulás Árnason if she wanted to marry his nephew, Philippús Símonarson. He was the Baglars' candidate for king, and he would be in a much stronger position with a king's daughter by his side. She, however, only wanted to marry a king who ruled a kingdom, not a man who just *called* himself king. It did not look to Kristín that Philippús would ever be such a man. The bishop hinted darkly that her kinsmen had neither the will nor desire to arrange a worthy marriage for her; his nephew, therefore, was better than any farmer's son in the kingdom. He also said that Philippús would only live up to his kingly name if he had a woman like her as his queen.¹¹³ Kristín finally agreed. She became Philippús's queen, but she also ended up disappointed. Philippús withdrew his claim to the throne not long after the wedding. Kristín was very angry at her husband; now he did not even venture to call himself king.¹¹⁴ But due to the binding nature of consent, she could not leave her husband, even if she considered him a fool. In this instance, canonical consent functioned as a strategic circumlocution of what her family would have chosen for her. Nikulás gave Kristín the opportunity to contract a valid marriage herself, but the promises of her husband's future power proved false. If the different understandings of consent could be unified in a better way, marriage would function much more as an instrument of peace for both the aristocracy and the Church.

A few situations indicate that efforts were being made towards such a solution by the beginning of the thirteenth century. One of the most important marriages in that time was between King Hákon Hákonarson and Earl Skúli's daughter Margrét. There were people in King Hákon's circle who proposed the marriage in the winter of 1218/19, and the fifteen-year-old Hákon hesitantly allowed himself to be convinced. The saga tells that Earl Skúli looked favourably on the courtship, 'but said that they should ask her mother, herself, and their relatives'.¹¹⁵ Bearing in mind the mighty power struggle going on between Skúli and Hákon, it seems amazing that Margrét herself was allowed to determine the fate of the match.¹¹⁶ But as the negotiations are portrayed in *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, both the family's and the

¹¹² It is quite possible that the disputes concerning Cecilia's two marriages, or a case similar to it, are the background to the ruling in the Christian law section in *Eiðsivabingslög*, where women who had been married for more than twelve months lost their right to appeal for lack of consent before the wedding.

¹¹³ Bgls, p. 115.

¹¹⁴ Bgls, p. 124.

¹¹⁵ HH ch. 54: 'Jarl tók þessu vel, ok skaut þó til móður hennar ok til hennar sjálfrar ok annarra þeirra frænda.'

¹¹⁶ Jochens, 'Consent', p. 146.

woman's consent are attended to in an exemplary way. Margrét's consent only strengthened the bond between the couple. That the marriage nevertheless failed to reconcile Skúli and Hákon is foreshadowed in Hákon's reluctant courtship. At the same time, it is significant that the marital bond between Hákon and Margrét never deteriorated.¹¹⁷ The link between consent and a strong marital bond belonged to a new marital ideology regarding the role of love between husband and wife. But the fact that Margrét's will was emphasized in 1219 is not entirely incongruous considering that women's consent was a big issue for the aristocracy and the Church in the cases surrounding the marriages of Cecilia Sigurðardóttir and Kristín Sverrisdóttir.

Summary

In this chapter, we have looked at secular and ecclesiastical conceptions of the meaning of consent. The aim has been to highlight the meeting of traditional Norse modes of thought regarding marriage and the doctrine of consent *as high-ranking Norwegian and Icelandic clerics understood and mediated it*.

The Church's doctrine of marriage was introduced into a pre-existing conception of the meaning of the relationship between husband and wife. It is true that women had little direct influence on the arrangement of their marriages, but a bad relationship between spouses had social and cultural significance beyond the nuclear household. Marriage without unity said something about the man's and woman's status as well as their household's social status. As a rule, it was *women* who initiated divorces, which the Icelanders regarded as acts to be interpreted in the light of their ideas of honour. If the *will* to be married disappeared, the marriage could also be ended. In the understanding of consent as an *intention* rather than an *act*, heroic consent resembles the Roman definition of *consensus* more than the canonical.

The meeting between the traditional, heroic view of marriage and canonical rules led to certain points of conflict between the people and the Church. According to the sagas, it was primarily fornication and incest regulations that created the hullabaloo in Iceland. With regard to consent, the situation was entirely different. Norse bishops had little desire to enforce the doctrine of consent to its full extent. In Iceland, consent was not written into the law until 1275, and in Norway the laws show that clerics did not expect the woman to be asked for her consent till after the suitor and the *giptingarmaðr* had come to an agreement. In the 1230s the situation was still unresolved as to how the individual's choice and the emotional bond should relate to the economic aspects of the union.

Nevertheless, the Church's doctrine of consent influenced attitudes in this period. In the saga literature, we find isolated examples of consent being emphasized right at the beginning of a match, though still in a heroic context. In Norway, the Church had

¹¹⁷ Orning, 'Fra egging til degging?', pp. 45–46.

become a power to reckon with after the establishment of the archbishopric. The law of succession for the first time made legitimate birth an important qualification for an heir to the throne. Even if the law was not always followed in practice, it gave marriage an exclusive position as a framework for a man's and woman's domestic relationship. That made it more important to find out what constituted a valid and indissoluble marriage. The utilization of canonical rules on consent shows that they were recognized as good, even if the canons' thinking behind the doctrine of *consensus* and *maritalis affectio* were far from internalized.

It is perhaps more surprising that the aristocracy itself put the doctrine of consent to use as early as the end of the twelfth century. Cecilía Sigurðardóttir bested Archbishop Eysteinn at argumentation when she dissolved her marriage to Fólkviðr. Kristín Sverrisdóttir experienced the binding power of consent in the opposite direction; her 'I do' meant that she had no way out of her marriage to Philippús. The aristocracy in Norway, as in Iceland, had a fundamental 'heroic' understanding of consent, but did not scruple to use the Church's doctrine of consent when it was in their own interests.

When we look for the reason why the doctrine of consent was accepted by the Norse aristocracy at all from the end of the twelfth century, an obvious place to begin is the changes in the function of marriage for royal power and the aristocracy. *Sturlunga saga* gives us the impression that divorce could be fatal in the accelerating power struggles in Iceland from the beginning of the thirteenth century. Marriage as a means of forging alliances was undermined, as the dissolution of Snorri's daughters' marriages showed. In the later sections of *Heimskringla*, Snorri emphasizes the peacemaking function of marriage, and that winning a woman's will and acknowledgement was important and stabilizing for society.

Thus, we can conclude that the Church played its most important role in supplying the terms for new marital norms in Iceland and Norway, but when it came to *consent* it was less than radical. The aristocracy, for its part, was receptive to the doctrine of consent, even if women's consent was seen in a traditional light. It is not until after 1230 that the emotional content of marriage worked its way loose from the heroic towards a Christian-courtly ideology. This is the subject we will consider in the next chapters.

Courtly Love and Holy Matrimony

Courtly Love — in Norway?

In 1226, Brother Robert translated the romance of Tristan and Isolde into Old Norse. It was the start of a comprehensive translation programme that resulted in the creation of around twenty Norse *riddarasögur*, or knights' sagas, from courtly verse romances.¹ Appraisal of the significance of chivalric literature in Norway has been varied. Some have said that Robert's translation marks the deterioration of the proud Norse spirit, while others have been enthusiastic about Robert's enlightening contribution to the dark North.² What both of these views have in common is the idea that courtly literature — whether for good or ill — is a foreign element in Norwegian society.

More recent scholarship has looked at how the translators reworked the romances into sagas. An example is the Old Norse philologist Eyvind Fjeld Halvorsen's study of *Karlamagnús saga*. He identified passages in the French original text that the Norse translator either omitted or embroidered, and so determined the themes most important to the translator. Particularly based on the translator's lack of interest in

¹ On the translated courtly literature of Norway, see Marianne Kalinke, 'Norse Romance (Riddarasögur)', in *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide*, ed. by Carol J. Clover and John Lindow, Islandica, 45 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 316–63; Geraldine Barnes, 'Some Current Issues in Riddarasögur Research', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 104 (1989), 73–88; Barnes, 'Riddarasögur, Translated', in *MSE*, pp. 531–33; Susanne Kramarz-Bein, *Die Piðreks saga im Kontext der altnorwegischen Literatur*, Beiträge zur Nordischen Philologie, 33 (Tübingen: Francke, 2002).

² The two different points of view are represented most clearly by Hans E. Kinck, *Storhetstid: Om vort aandsliv og den literære kultur i det trettende aarhundrede* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1922), and Paul V. Rubow, *Små kritiske breve* (Copenhagen: Levin & Munksgaard, 1936).

the use of weapons and battle scenes, Halvorsen concluded that the translator was more likely to have been a cleric than a secular magnate. The translator's knowledge of French was deficient; he probably had studied French in England.³

As Halvorsen's research shows, the *riddarasögur* were seldom literal translations; they were rather adaptations of original content to a Norse frame of reference. Other studies have shown how honour,⁴ royal power and the court,⁵ the relationship of the aristocracy to religious ideals,⁶ and the image of women⁷ shifted in the transition from verse romance to saga. Translators brought out elements they found particularly important, added new meanings, and cut episodes they did not find conducive to the progression of the story. This comparative work makes it possible to analyze how foreign stories of love were used and adapted to traditional attitudes.⁸

³ Eyvind Fjeld Halvorsen, *The Norse Version of Chanson de Roland*, Bibliotheca Arnamagnæana, 19 (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1959).

⁴ Marianne E. Kalinke, 'Honor: The Motivating Principle of the *Erex Saga*', *Scandinavian Studies*, 45 (1973), 135–43.

⁵ Shaun F. D. Hughes, 'The Ideal of Kingship in the *Riddarasögur*', *Michigan Academician*, 10 (1978), 321–36; Marianne E. Kalinke, *King Arthur North-by-Northwest: The matière de Bretagne in Old Norse-Icelandic Romances*, Bibliotheca Arnamagnæana, 37 (Copenhagen: Reitzel, 1981); Hermann Reichert, 'King Arthur's Round Table: Sociological Implications of its Literary Reception in Scandinavia', in *Structure and Meaning in Old Norse Literature: New Approaches to Textual Analysis and Literary Criticism*, ed. by John Lindow, Lars Lönnroth, and Gerd Wolfgang Weber, The Viking Collection, 3 (Odense: Odense University Press, 1986), pp. 394–414; Bjarne Fidjestøl, *Selected Papers*, ed. by Odd Einar Haugen and Else Mundal, trans. by Peter Foote, The Viking Collection, 9 (Odense: Odense University Press, 1997), pp. 351–66.

⁶ Henry Kratz, 'The Parcevals saga and Li Contes del Graal', *Scandinavian Studies*, 49 (1977), 13–47; Geraldine Barnes, 'Parcevals Saga: Riddara Skuggsjá?', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 99 (1984), 49–62.

⁷ Marianne E. Kalinke, '*Erex saga* and *Ívens saga*: Medieval Approaches to Translation', *Arkiv för Nordisk Filologi*, 92 (1977), 125–44.

⁸ Sverre Bagge, *Mennesket i middelalderens Norge: Tanker, tro og holdninger* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1998), p. 189. There is a certain debate between those who believe the translated *riddarasögur* were primarily meant for entertainment and that translators quite unconsciously altered the romances according to traditional Norse genres and mentalities (see Kalinke, *King Arthur*; Gerd Wolfgang Weber, 'The Decadence of Feudal Myth: Towards a Theory of Riddarasaga and Romance', in *Structure and Meaning in Old Norse Literature*, ed. by Lindow, Lönnroth, and Weber, pp. 415–54; Carol J. Clover, 'Scene in Saga Composition', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 89 (1974), 57–83) and those who argue that the changes are made deliberately to teach young aristocrats knightly virtues (see Geraldine Barnes, 'The Riddarasögur and Mediaeval European literature', *Mediaeval Scandinavia*, 8 (1975), 140–58; Susanne Kramarz-Bein, 'Höfische Unterhaltung und ideologisches Ziel Das Beispiel der altnorwegischen *Parcevals saga*', in *Die Aktualität der Saga: Festschrift für Hans Schottmann*, ed. by Stig Toftgaard Andersen, *Ergänzungsbande zum Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde*, 21 (Berlin:

The first part of this chapter will look at the significance of love to the individual, society, and the institution of marriage in the *riddarasögur*. Then I will try to trace the influence of these new ideals on the understanding of love within and outside of marriage in Norway. The literature produced for the Norwegian *hirð* will be the principal source in this chapter; that discussion will be followed by a look at runic inscriptions and subsequently legal documents. Together they can give us the answer to whether — and if so, how — courtly love found its way into Norwegian hearts and minds in the thirteenth century.

Courtly Knights and Learned Romantics

By the middle of the twelfth century, Paris and many of the Northern European courts had become centres for learning and poetry. In the last quarter of the twelfth century and the beginning of the thirteenth, the range of courtly literature had become far greater in Northern Europe than in the south. Learned authors like Béroul, Geoffrey of Monmouth, Marie de France, Chrétien de Troyes, Andreas Capellanus, Hartmann von Aue, Gottfried von Strassbourg, and Wolfram von Eschenbach were inspired by Provençal troubadour poetry, also deriving inspiration from classical literature, heroic poetry, and Breton folktales and legends. The form of presentation had shifted from subjective poetry to stories of knights who lived in a diffuse world in a distant and mythical time. But this material was used differently by authors at the courts of Blois, Champagne, Strassbourg, London, and elsewhere. Personal interests and patrons' wishes shaped the way they portrayed the feudal bond of loyalty, religious ideals, knightly norms, and relations between the sexes.⁹

de Gruyter, 1999), pp. 63–84). It seems possible, however, that some sagas were changed more deliberately than others. Another problem in using the *riddarasögur* as sources is that many of them are preserved only in late manuscripts. Some scholars have suggested that some of these translations should be considered as redactions or abbreviations made by Icelandic scribes; see Kalinke, *King Arthur*. Still, comparisons with early (where they exist) and late manuscripts on some of the *riddarasögur* have indicated a fairly close transmission of the early translation; see Peter Hallberg, 'Norröna riddarsagor: Några språkdrag', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 86 (1971), 114–38, and Geraldine Barnes, 'The riddarasögur: A Medieval Exercise in Translation', *Saga-Book*, 19 (1977), 403–41. However, for some of the sagas it is impossible to check the changes made by later scribes; while some are preserved as early as the thirteenth century, others (like *Ívents saga* from *Yvain* and *Erex saga* from *Erec et Enide*) are only preserved in eighteenth-century résumés.

⁹ The concept of 'courtly love' or *amour courtois* was questioned in the 1960s and 1970s, especially by D. W. Robertson Jr, 'The Concept of Courtly Love as an Impediment to the Understanding of Medieval Texts', in *The Meaning of Courtly Love*, ed. by F. X. Newman (New York: State University of New York Press, 1968), pp. 1–18; John F. Benton, 'Clio and Venus: An Historical View of Medieval Love', in *ibid.*, pp. 19–42; Henry Ansgar Kelly, *Love and Marriage in the Age of Chaucer* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975); John C. Moore,

Good examples of this are *Tristan*, *Le Conte del Graal* (or *Perceval*) by Chrétien de Troyes, and the *Lais* of Marie de France. These three works were very popular on the European continent and were translated (or ‘edited’) into many languages. All three were translated during King Hákon Hákonarson’s reign into the versions known as *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar*, *Parcevals saga*, and *Strengleikar*. In different ways, these works took up current social problems relating to love. Thus, the first part of this chapter will focus on the Norse translations of these three works.

The Tristan legend is about the tensions between love’s power over the couple in love and the lovers’ relation to feudal loyalties, kinship relations, and the marital bond. The love of Tristan and Isolde is antisocial; the only way to live out that love is to retreat from society. They are united only in death; two trees spring up from the graves and their branches grow entwined. The Tristan legend gives no solution to the social problem a romantic relationship creates; it does not show how ardent love can coexist with the social demands under which people unavoidably live.¹⁰

Chrétien de Troyes’s romance about the knight Perceval is, despite the fact that it remained unfinished, perhaps his most accomplished and complex. It is about a young man’s education in knightly virtues: the art of war, courtly conduct, and finally the mysteries of Christianity. His feelings also undergo a development, first in relation to his mother, whom he left to become a knight, then to women in general and love in particular, until finally he becomes humble with regard to the divine. Perceval is the knight who, more than any other, unifies chivalric virtues — including love — with Christian ideals such as humility and sincerity.

Marie de France’s *Lais* are anchored in Breton tales from a magical landscape, but deal first and foremost with the power of love. Marie’s stories examine different psychological facets of love: its rise and fall, the lovers’ faithfulness or faithlessness, their happiness or misfortune. The destinies of the many characters combine to create a larger picture of a ‘morality of love’. The many stories serve as examples of good and bad forms of love.

“‘Courtly Love’: A Problem of Terminology’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 40 (1979), 621–32. Their criticism showed that courtly love could not be confined into a single model of illegitimacy, servility of the lover, and love that is mostly platonic in character, as was the argument of Gaston Paris and C. S. Lewis.

¹⁰ Joan M. Ferrante, *The Conflict of Love and Honor: The Medieval Tristan Legend in France, Germany and Italy* (The Hague: Mouton, 1973), p. 16. The story of Tristan is preserved in only five versions in the years from c. 1155 to 1226. The versions have different emphases on particular episodes, narrative techniques, and descriptions of society, but the main theme of the story is recognizable. The earliest versions of the Tristan story are all incomplete (Béroul 1155–87, Thomas of Britain c. 1170–75, Eilhart von Oberg 1170s or 1185–90, and Gottfried von Strassburg c. 1200–10). The Norse *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar*, based on Thomas’s version, is then the earliest complete version of the story of Tristan and Isolde that is preserved.

*The Power of Love***A Lover and a Fighter: The Male Hero's Discovery of Love**

In the early Norse Middle Ages, men's love was seldom dwelt upon, at least within the poem's emotional discourse. Men were not supposed to be softened by feelings for women. The heroic portrayal of love was most concerned with the love and the honour a woman could give a man or take from him. Therefore, love was surrounded by a certain social brittleness: an individual's desire could really be a threat to society. Is the ardent love of male characters toned down in the *riddarasögur* in comparison to the French originals? To what degree did the translators seek to create a dialogue between the new ideals of love and traditional norms for warriors?

Tristrams saga begins with the story of Tristram's father, Kanelangres of Bretland.¹¹ Initially, he is portrayed as a warrior of the well-known Norse type, whose most important values are conquering his enemies by raw force and showing generosity to his men. Over the years, Kanelangres and his men expand the kingdom through plundering and war. After many conquests, he and twenty of his best men go to England, which is ruled by King Markis. Kanelangres has heard that Markis's *hirð* is foremost in courtly conduct (*hirðligrar siðvenju*), and wants to see for himself if it is true. Despite the fact that they are richly furnished with clothing and weapons, Kanelangres and his men feel out of place in the presence of the friendly King Markis. They simply do not know the rules of chivalry as well as their hosts. But Kanelangres and his men show themselves to be good students. They soon impress the English with their skills in the tournaments and their deportment at the King's table.

With Kanelangres, both the saga and its audience move from a traditional warrior society to a courtly *hirð*. The saga takes us in an elegant way from a world governed by traditional warrior ideals to an elevated courtly setting with new norms for actions and emotions. The saga emphasizes that Kanelangres is the foremost in all kinds of warrior virtues, but has to learn how to act as a knight in peacetime as well as in battle, a lesson that may have been useful for members of the Norwegian *hirð*.

The transition from Bretland to Markis's court soon proves to have an impact on Kanelangres's love life. He falls deeply in love with King Markis's beautiful sister

¹¹ *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar* is only preserved completely in manuscripts from the seventeenth century. These versions are probably all based on the manuscript AM 567 XXII 4° (Det arnamagnæanske institut, Copenhagen) from the fifteenth century. Comparisons of these manuscripts and the fragments of Thomas's version still reveal, despite cuts in the psychological explorations and inner monologues, that the Norse version follows the structure of the French original quite closely; see Halvorsen, *Norse Version*, pp. 17–18; Hallberg, 'Norröna riddarsagor'; Barnes, 'Some Current Issues', pp. 74–77. There is also an Icelandic version of the Tristan material from the fifteenth century that differs from the *Tristrams saga* in the handling of the main characters, the plot, and the view on love; see Paul Schach, 'The *Saga af Tristram ok Ísödd*: Summary or Satire?', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 21 (1960), 336–52.

Blensinbil. It is not long before he can think of nothing else than seeking her company. He hides his feelings for her as well as he can, and suffers dreadfully because he (mistakenly) believes that she will not accept his love. But at this point, Kanelangres has become so familiar with the rules of the courtly game that he manages tactfully to have private conversations with Blensinbil. He finds out exactly when he can meet Blensinbil without anyone else finding out. With his newly won conversational skills, he wins the heart of the King's beautiful sister. This prehistory provides a starting point for the saga's great love story of Tristram and Ísönd by portraying a good relationship, at the same time showing that a good education in chivalry is also a preparation for a knight's encounters with women and love.

A similar awakening of the manly hero to both courtly virtues and love's woes can be found in *Strengleikar* and *Parcevals saga*. The first hero we meet in *Strengleikar* is Guiamar.¹² He is a great warrior: handsome, clever, bold, and well-liked by all. But in his youth he is completely devoid of interest in love and women.¹³ While hunting a hind he gets a wound that will not heal. The hind tells him that the wound will not heal until he suffers love. In seeking relief for his wound, he meets a woman who causes him to feel wonderful: 'He feels now what he never felt before. He has now forgotten his native country entirely, his father and his relatives and his foster-brothers, and he feels no pain at all from his wound.'¹⁴ Their love is great, but the woman is already married. When they part, he is powerless and despondent. His friends say he should marry another to forget his grief, but Guiamar will hear nothing of other women. Guiamar's sorrow does not subside until the end of the story, when he is reunited with his love.¹⁵

¹² The Norse translation of Marie de France's *Lais* is preserved in the manuscript *De la Gardie 4-7* (Delagardieske samlingen, Uppsala Universitetsbibliotek, Uppsala) from c. 1270. This manuscript hardly represents the original translation, but is usually considered to be quite faithful to the French texts, even though some of the *lais* are abridged. The manuscript is also important for scholarship on Marie de France in general, since four of the translated *lais* are not known from other sources. Philologists have argued that the *lais* were translated by several scribes, but probably all during the reign of Hákon Hákonarson; see Mattias Tveitane, 'Introduction', in *Strengleikar: An Old Norse Translation of Twenty-one French Lais*, ed. by Mattias Tveitane, trans. by Robert Cook, Norrøne tekster, 3 (Oslo: Norsk historisk kjeldeskrift-institutt, 1979), pp. ix-xxxvii (pp. xxvi-xxviii).

¹³ Str, p. 12: 'En þat var undarlegst i hans natturo at hann hafnaðe vandlega konom at unna' (But what was most strange in his nature was that he completely avoided loving women). In the French version this is his most evident flaw; both friends and strangers regarded him as doomed because nature had given him all its gifts except the ability to love. The Norse version more moderately regards this as 'most strange' (*undarlegst*).

¹⁴ Str, p. 24: 'ok kænnir hann nu þat er hann kændi alldri fyrr. Allu hævur hann nu glöeymt fostrlande sinu fæðr oko frændom ok fostrbræðrum, ok kænner hann allzængan verk sarssins.'

¹⁵ Str, p. 40: 'ok stæig sua yvir alla sina harma'.

In *Parcevals saga*, the hero is similarly unfamiliar with and little interested in love's mysteries in his youth.¹⁶ He grows up with his mother, a widow who has lost her husband in war. To protect her only son, she teaches him nothing of the outside world. One day he sees some men in armour ride past the house, and he is so fascinated that he wants to follow after them. His mother reluctantly lets him go out into the world and gives him some advice for his journey. Parceval nevertheless starts out on his journey with minimal experience, and his first encounter with a young lady gives a comic picture of a man who does not know how to act with a woman. His mother told him that he could take a ring and a kiss from a maiden, but nothing more. When he finds one sleeping in a tent, he takes a kiss from her against her will (*nauðga*). He asks for nothing more, since his mother has forbidden him to take anything else from a woman against her will.¹⁷

In Chrétien's work, the episode functions as a contrast between an ignorant squire and a chivalric knight. Interestingly enough, this episode is modified somewhat in the Norse translation. Chrétien wants to show that Parceval transgresses his mother's command and, in his ignorance, sins against her and the young lady. The saga, on the other hand, emphasizes that he only misunderstood his mother because of his lack of training in courtly conduct.¹⁸ This apology for Parceval's actions made it even easier for members of the Norwegian *hirð* to identify with the saga's hero; their unfamiliarity with the code of chivalry did not make them sinners. They, like Parceval, had an innate potential to learn the art of meeting women in a better way than demanding a kiss.

Parceval's 'awakening' to women has both a psychological and a social side. The hero goes from being a 'child' to becoming clear about his erotic urges. This discovery is linked to chivalric norms which restrain the knight's lust. It is through conversation and discretion that women are won. Displays of strength and courage on the battlefield are not enough if a knight does not also use wisdom and courage in his encounters with ladies as well. To acknowledge and confess love does not mean that the hero loses his masculine identity — on the contrary. Guiamar is called 'bold' when he confesses his great love. Another hero in *Strengleikar* is called bold when he stops a beautiful woman in the forest.¹⁹ The Norwegian audience may have found

¹⁶ *Parcevals saga* is preserved almost completely in the manuscript *Holm perg 6 4°* (Kungliga biblioteket, Stockholm) from the early fifteenth century. The Norse translation differs in structure from the unfinished version of Chrétien de Troyes. The story of Gauvin is taken out of the story of Parceval and made into a short story (*Valvens þáttur*) that is appended to the saga. The translator, or the Icelandic scribe, also added a few end-rhyming couplets to the end of each chapter.

¹⁷ Parc ch. 1, p. 110: 'ok þó at þik lysti til nokkurrar konu, þá tak eigi meira af henni nauðgri en einn koss módir mín fyrirbaud mér at taka konu nauðga'.

¹⁸ Barnes, 'Parcevals Saga', pp. 54–55.

¹⁹ Str, p. 116: 'En herra desire oflugar ok diarfr ok hinn skiotasti a foeti, gat þegar tekit hana i hægra hond hennar ok mællti til hennar bliðum orðum ok hogværóm.'

it a strange kind of courage, but on the other hand, who of them could in all honesty say that he was comfortable in the role of chivalric suitor? The stories of Kanelangres, Guiamar, and Parceval must have been a challenge to traditional conceptions of the warrior's role and the definition of bold and courageous action, but it was also coveted knowledge among Norwegian *hirð* members who wanted to be introduced to courtly customs from Europe. The heroes in the *riddarasögur* clarified the differences in relations between the sexes in a warrior society and a courtly context.

Nevertheless, warrior values are not neglected. The relationship between the knight's warrior role and his service of love can be problematic. The woman in *Desire* says to her lover that he should hurry back to his king because 'it is not right that any knight should give up his reputation for the love of women'.²⁰ In *Gurun* the dwarf, the woman's counsellor, represents traditional ideals: 'This knight [Gurun] knows well how to kiss; it would be more suitable for him to know just as well how to ride with knightly weapons'.²¹ In this story, the dwarf is condemned for his attitudes because he tries to hinder the relationship between the two lovers, and the story eventually makes it clear that Gurun *can* fight, if he must. But the focus is not primarily on Gurun's abilities and courage in conflicts with other men; the fear that love will not be returned is both greater and more important than the fear of enemies on the battlefield.

Thus, love and honour are not mutually exclusive. The *riddarasögur* aim to show how bravery, honour, and love can function together. Love does not expose a knight to ridicule; to love is a natural part of his chivalric character. Not least, love is an art a man can learn just like any other courtly skill.

Love: An Emotion That Distinguishes?

A love relationship could traditionally increase a young man's honour through the woman's role as one who assigned honour, and because he challenged the honour of the woman's husband or *giptingarmaðr*. In the *riddarasögur*, a man does not win honour by challenging another man for a woman. In *Tristrams saga*, King Markis is indeed completely fooled by his nephew Tristram and his wife Ísönd. Naturally, he is insulted when he discovers the deception, and he tries many times to avenge it; but he regrets it every time. He does not want to believe that his own dear wife would deceive him. For him, the talk and rumours about an affair are not enough to kill Tristram. And Tristram's aim is not to offend his uncle's honour. The love story is

²⁰ Str, p. 116: 'engum riddara samir at fuyrirlata frægð sína sacar kvenna asta'. In the story of *Grelent*, the hero will not return the queen's love because he wants to be loyal towards his lord instead: Str, p. 284. Kanelangres in *Tristrams saga* returns to Bretland to defend his land against intruders and is killed on the battlefield.

²¹ Str, p. 176: 'þessi riddare kvað hann kann vel kyssa, macara være at hann kynni iamvel riða, með riddara vapnum.'

marked by secrecy, not by confrontation. This is perhaps the greatest difference between *Tristrams saga* and the early Icelandic skalds' sagas. The feeling of love in itself becomes a sign of distinction.

Being loved is still important for men in the *riddarasögur*. In *Strengleikar*, the woman who loves the handsomest and best warrior is a recurrent theme.²² In *Tristrams saga*, a rival claims that he, rather than Tristram, has killed the dragon. This rival is not a real knight but a malicious coward, liar, and traitor.²³ Ísönd has only contempt for him and perceives that Tristram is the true slayer of the dragon. Such episodes can easily have been seen in the context of Norse conceptions of the woman's heroic love for the best warrior. But in addition, the *riddarasögur* make a distinction between different types of love women have for men. In *Tristrams saga*, all women love Kanelangres for his courage, appearance, and strength. Therefore, it is only natural that Blensinbil also falls in love with him. But in contrast to the other women's love, Blensinbil's is portrayed in a positive light. The other women want Kanelangres right away; they prefer to have their desires fulfilled right away rather than to curb their lusts. Blensinbil, however, is ignorant of the power of love, and she struggles against her feelings. She believes at first that she is suffering from an illness: 'This cruel distress has a strange hold upon me. I have no pain in my limbs, yet this heat burns me, and I do not know where it comes from.'²⁴ Later she understands that Kanelangres is the source of her suffering (or passion). She believes he has magical powers since he has such power over her, and before she becomes acquainted with him she prays to God to be freed from her torture.

The heroine in *Guiamar* is similarly filled with secret love-sorrows. Nevertheless, she is careful when Guiamar reveals his love to her. She does not want to give the impression that she is a loose woman even though it is clear that the love between them is good.²⁵ An example of such a loose woman can be found in *Grelent*, where the queen casts her eye over the young hero and demands his love.²⁶ The fine line between loving and being self-controlled creates problems for women in love. In *Parcevals saga*, the lady Blankiflúr is comforted by an unsuspecting Parceval when enemies threaten her castle. Her forwardness is excused by her having no ulterior motive in the visit, and it is at this moment that Parceval's (chaste) love is awakened. Blankiflúr succeeds in hiding her love in her tears and leaves the knight to take the initiative.²⁷

²² Str, pp. 30, 112–18, 136, 184, 282.

²³ Trist ch. 41, p. 45: 'inn mesti metnaðarmaðr [. . .] illgjarn ok undirhyggjusamr, prettvíss ok lygimaðr ok falsari'.

²⁴ Trist ch. 6, p. 9: 'Kynliga heldr mik þessi grimmi angr; øngan hefði ek verk í limum mínum; en bruni þessi brennir mik, en ek veit ei hvaða kemr.'

²⁵ Str, p. 26: 'æigi em ec lætlættes kona, ne von sliku misværki'.

²⁶ Str, p. 284.

²⁷ Parc ch. 7, pp. 130–32.

It is just such a combination of naïve, innocent love, moderation, secrecy, and discreet conversation that creates a divide between courtly love and other male-female relationships. The love between Kanelangres and Blensinbil is thus praised for its worth and refinement.²⁸ Was this ‘art of love’ seen as an inborn quality, or could it be learned?

Kanelangres may be regarded as an example of an unlearned man with an abiding interest in chivalrous conduct, even though he had no knowledge of such norms in early life. Perceval in Chrétien’s romance is in a continual state of psychological development, where love is an important part of his education. *Parcevals saga* makes it even clearer that the knight shows inborn heroic qualities.²⁹ Therefore, the saga is much less eager to characterize the young Perceval as ‘foolish’ or a ‘simpleton’ (*nices*), as Chrétien does. Instead, the saga attributes Perceval’s early mistakes to his youth and the fact that he is not yet familiar with courtly custom.³⁰ It is the hero’s innate capacity for learning the arts of war and true love that are emphasized in the saga, but these qualities must be cultivated in the right environment to bring them to fulfilment.³¹ This made heroes like Kanelangres and Perceval good role models for Norwegian aristocrats: they had chivalric refinement already, and all that was lacking was the formal education. Heroes will always be brave, but that is only a part of what is required of a courtly lover. In a good relationship, the man and woman share certain social values that are difficult for others to attain. Courtly love is an exclusive emotion; only the love that comes from a noble heart finds its way into the hearts of noble people.

This love ethic shows traces of Aristotelean and Ciceronean thought. According to Aristotle, man’s purpose is to strive to realize his natural, innate possibilities and satisfy his needs and desires. It is important for him to act in accordance with his nature. Through inner development and striving, man will attain a feeling or intuition

²⁸ The terms used are *ástsemð* and *fagri list*; see Trist ch. 10, p. 12. The saga tells that Kanelangres ‘behaved in this matter, just as in all others, well and honourably’ (Trist ch. 9, p. 11: ‘Ferr hann nú í þessu ok öllu öðru vel ok virðuliga’).

²⁹ Weber, ‘Decadence’, pp. 449–50; Barnes, ‘Parcevals Saga’, pp. 54–57.

³⁰ Parc ch. 2, p. 116: ‘Þat má vera þó at þessi sveinn sé ungr, at hann sé kominn frá góðum mönnum, þvíat hann hefir friða ásjónu ok drengiliga. En þat er eitt at atferðum hans, at hann er eigi vanr hirðsiðum’ (Though this boy is young, he may be descended from good stock, for he has a handsome and bold appearance. The only fault in his behaviour is that he is not familiar with the customs of the court). This section of the Norse translation is expanded somewhat from the French original, probably to excuse the hero’s uncourtly behaviour.

³¹ Parc ch. 5, p. 126: ‘hann hafði slíkan vápnaburð af kynfylgju ok náttúru sjálfs sins ok var hann inn djarfasti til vápna ok námfúss slíkt at nema. Góð náttúra er gott nemandi þeim er at góðu eru kunnandi. Gott kemr aldin af góðum viði: svá er ok góðr máðr með góðum siði’ (for he had acquired such skill in bearing of arms as a family trait, and out of his own nature, and he was most daring in arms and eager to learn to acquire such knowledge. Good character brings a good return for those who good things can discern. Good fruit comes from a good tree: so a good man has good habits naturally).

for actions that are good, called *habitus*. Those who have attained this ethical state will succeed in realizing the natural possibilities to be found in a human being. This concept attained a unique relevance when translated to the knightly culture of the Middle Ages; the innate qualities of aristocrats were realized through education in chivalric deeds, and from the close of the eleventh century, also through love between men and women.³² In Grelent's words: 'It is not for all men to love courteous women. It is fitting for one who desires to be worthy of fine love to be proven for perfect goodness.'³³ The encounter with women was thus one situation where knights could realize their natural chivalric qualities (other such situations being conduct in battle, at court, and in church). Good lovers reinforce each other's ennobled *habitus* through their love.

The *riddarasögur* introduced to a Norse audience a forerunner of what is often called 'romantic' love. The sociologist Anthony Giddens has described this type of love as a relationship in which the man and woman complement one another.³⁴ In their love for one another is an element of self-realization because they have found someone with whom they 'fit'. In the *riddarasögur* we only have a hint of such thought regarding love. The greatest change for the medieval mind must have been the man's love no longer entailing an element of risk, either for his own honour or for anyone else's. Courtly love (including premarital and extramarital relationships) presupposed that the man and the woman belonged to the same aristocratic society. Thus, courtly love had an inbuilt sense of *jafnræði* between the man's and woman's families. The bond of love between the man and woman had become more important than the balance of power between the man and the woman's *giptingarmaðr*.

Love and the Church

In this section, our attention will turn to a closer examination of the ecclesiastical role in the introduction of the new ideals of love. Could clerics have been interested in translating romances into Old Norse, despite the often sinful character of love stories?

The Background and Message of the Translators

We only know the name of one Norwegian translator from the thirteenth century, the monk Robert. There is much to indicate that he was originally from England and that

³² See C. Stephen Jaeger, *Ennobling Love: In Search of a Lost Sensibility* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999).

³³ Str, p. 284: 'þat er ei allra mann at unna kurteisum konom, þeim samir at vera reyndir i fullkomnum goðleic, er girniz at vera verðugr ricrar astar.'

³⁴ Anthony Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1992), pp. 37–41.

he was part of a larger English cultural wave that came to Norway though the monasteries.³⁵ Some have argued that foreign jongleurs (*leikarar*) translated other *riddarasögur* in collaboration with members of the Norwegian court. Certain stories in *Strengleikar* have been regarded as so coarse that they would not have been promulgated by conscientious monks.³⁶ I believe many medieval monks were quite comfortable with the content of the *riddarasögur*, and the fact that a few passages are erased from manuscripts of *Strengleikar* represents the exception rather than the rule. Even if we imagine that foreign *leikarar* took courtly stories with them to Norway, we must also assume that their Norwegian ‘collaborative partners’ had at least a clerical education. Literary skills were not exactly high on the list of priorities for members of the *hirð* at the beginning of the thirteenth century; cultivating such skills required time, resources, and interest. Young clerics at King Hákon’s court would surely have had a better chance with the visiting jongleurs and musicians than other *hirð* members. In Norway, clerics were the men with the language and reading skills to be able to translate French romances into Old Norse. Eyvind Fjeld Halvorsen sets the Norse translators’ efforts in this perspective: ‘To a Scandinavian of the thirteenth century, the task of translating a *chanson de geste* must have been just as difficult as for a modern scholar to translate the *Iliad*.’³⁷ The translation was also characterized by its own ‘courtly style’ that had more in common with learned, scholastic translated literature than the traditional saga style.³⁸ *Strengleikar* contains certain Latin interpolations and a moral discussion of love that are not to be found in French manuscripts. One cannot get around the existence of an ecclesiastical, learned milieu in the search for the creative catalyst of the *riddarasögur*.³⁹

Can we imagine any reason why the clerical translators might have had a personal interest in translating such works? In *Strengleikar*, the translator has appended his own prologue, which may give us an idea of what he wanted to achieve with his translation:

³⁵ Henry Goddard Leach, *Angevin Britain and Scandinavia*, Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature, 6 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1921), pp. 179–83; see also Ludvig Holm-Olsen, *Den gammelnorske oversettelsen av Pamphilus: Med en undersøkelse av paleografi og lydverk*, Avhandlingar utgitt av Det norske videnskaps-akademi i Oslo, II Hist.-filos. klasse, 1940:2 (Oslo: Dybwad, 1940), pp. 83–85.

³⁶ Anne Holtmark, review of E. F. Halvorsen, *The Norse Version of the Chanson de Roland*, *Maal og Minne*, 1959, 161–70 (p. 163); Tveitane, ‘Introduction’, pp. xxv–xxviii.

³⁷ Halvorsen, *Norse Version*, p. 103.

³⁸ Halvorsen, *Norse Version*, pp. 1–11; Jónas Kristjánsson, *Eddas and Sagas: Iceland’s Medieval Literature*, 3rd edn (Reykjavik: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1997), pp. 310–12.

³⁹ There have been some attempts to identify the centres where *riddarasögur* were written. Finn Hødnø, ‘De la Gardie 4–7 folio’, in *Festskrift til Alfred Jakobsen*, ed. by Jan Ragnar Hagland and others (Trondheim: Tapir, 1987), pp. 91–105, argued that *De la Gardie 4–7* was written in (or by a man from) Stavanger. Usually, however, Bergen is identified as the site where most of the translations were made; see Kramarz-Bein, *Die Þiðreks saga*.

At hæve þeirra er i fyrnskunni varo likaðe oss at forvitna ok rannzaka því at þær var listugir i velom sinom glægsynir i skynsemdom, hygnir i raðagærðom vaskir i vapnom hæverskir i hirðsiðum millder i giofum ok at allskonar drængscap, hinir frægiazto [. . .], þa syndizc oss at fræða verande ok viðrkomande þeim sogum er margfroðer menn gærðo um athæve þeirra sem i fyrnskunni varo ok a bokom leto rita [. . .]. Sva ok at hvern ihugi með allre kunnasto ok koste með ollu afle fremre ok fullgere með ollum fongum at bua ok bæta sialvan sec til rikis guðs með somasamlegum siðum ok goðom athævom ok hælgom lifsænda, því at daðer ok drængskaper ok allzkonar goðlæikr er skryddi ok pryddi lif þeirra er guði likaðo, ok þeirra er i þessa hæims atgærðom frægðost ok vinsældozt i fyrnskonne hverfr þess giorsamlegre sem hæims þessa dagar mæirr fram liða. (Str, p. 4)

It pleased us to inquire about and examine the deeds of those who lived in olden days, because they were skilled in their arts, discerning in their reason, clever in their counsels, valiant with weapons, well-mannered in the customs of the court, generous with gifts, and most famous for every kind of nobility. [. . .] [I]t occurred to us to teach men living and those to come these stories, which men of great learning made about the deeds of those who lived in olden days [. . .], and so that everyone might consider with full knowledge and strive with all his strength and accomplish and achieve with every opportunity to prepare and improve himself for the kingdom of God by means of fitting behaviour and good deeds and a holy life's end. For deeds and nobility and every kind of goodness, which embellished and adorned the lives of those who pleased God and those who in olden days earned fame and favours by means of achievements in this world — these things are disappearing more and more as the days of this world march on. (trans. from Str, p. 5)

Here the translator shows his interest in calling attention to the past as a moral example for warriors in the present. This was the same motivation the Danish historian Saxo Grammaticus gave in his *Gesta Danorum* some decades before. Seeing one's own time as one of decay was widespread in learned circles in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and stories of the past were held up as examples of chivalric conduct.⁴⁰ Striving for chivalric conduct was portrayed as an integral part of getting closer to God. In this concept we see traces of the introspection and individualism that was latent in the theology developed by the twelfth-century Church, which stressed every person's responsibility for his own salvation.⁴¹

This prologue is the closest we come to a clearly expressed 'agenda' for the translation work. In other places it may seem as if the entertainment aspect is the most important motive, as when Brother Robert says that he will tell of 'the unbearable

⁴⁰ C. Stephen Jaeger, *The Origins of Courtliness: Civilizing Trends and the Formation of Courtly Ideals 939–1210* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), pp. 185–86, 228–30. Other additions that the translator of the *Lais* wrote point in the same direction. In *Jonet* and *Stranda Strengleikar* the translator(s) prays for God's blessing as a reward for his efforts: Str, pp. 204, 244.

⁴¹ Colin Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual, 1050–1200*, Medieval Academy Reprints for Teaching, 19 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), pp. 139–57.

love' of Tristram and Ísönd.⁴² In a few places, the Christian symbolism of the original is lost, as in *Parcevals saga*: that the Holy Grail (*gangandi greiðan*) is meant to have a religious function clearly seems to have escaped the Norwegian translator.⁴³

But even if the Christian symbolism is lost, the translator of *Le Conte del Graal* nevertheless emphasizes certain spiritual norms even more strongly than Chrétien did. There is a particular emphasis on Parceval's *lítillátr*, humility. In conversations with the holy man at the end of the saga, Parceval realizes that he sinned when he neglected to ask the Fisher King about the meaning of the Grail. But after confessing this, Parceval receives forgiveness, along with these warnings: 'And you, kinsman, be careful of your soul from now on. Always go to church before going any other place, and hear Mass with humility towards God. Be humble and obliging to all needy people.'⁴⁴ The ideal echoes the advice Parceval's mother gave him at the beginning of the saga: 'Be God-fearing, [. . .] be humble towards good men.'⁴⁵ This is reminiscent of Jesus's words as quoted in the Norwegian Book of Homilies: 'Learn from me, because I am meek and humble of heart.'⁴⁶ *Lítillátr* (from Latin *humilitas*) was one of the seven cardinal virtues in the Middle Ages, particularly encouraged by the influential Bernard of Clairvaux at the beginning of the twelfth century and practiced with great zeal by the mendicant orders of the thirteenth. In Old Norse literature from before 1225, we find *lítillátr* as a virtue first and foremost in bishops' and saints' sagas; for magnates, *mikillæti* (pride) was more of an ideal.⁴⁷

In *Tristrams saga*, the Christian virtues are brought into focus through the eponymous hero. Tristram's upbringing might lead us to believe he would become a bishop rather than a knight:

Síðan lét hann kenna hánúm bókræði ok var hann hinn næmasti, ok fræddist hann í þessu námi, VII höfuðvélum, ok snildast hann allskonar tungum; því næst nam hann VII strengleika, svá at engi fannst hánúm frægri né betr kunnandi; en at göðlyndi ok mildleik ok hirðligri hæversku, at viti ok ráðum ok hreysti fannst enginn hánúm gnógari; at síðum ok sæmdum var engi hans maki. (Trist ch. 17, pp. 16–17)

⁴² Trist, Introd., p. 5: 'Hér skrifast sagan af Tristram ok Ísönd dróttningu, í hverri talat verður um óbærlega ást, er þau höfði sín á millum.'

⁴³ Kalinke, *King Arthur*, pp. 75–77; Weber, 'Decadence', p. 445.

⁴⁴ Parc ch. 18, p. 180: 'En þú, frændi, gæt nú héðan af sálu þinnar ok gakk jafnan til kirkju fyrr en í nokkurn stað annan ok hlýð messu með lítillæti til guðs. Ver lítillátr ok þjónustufullr öllum þurftugum.' This is an even stronger emphasis on humility than in Chrétien's story of the Grail; cf. Barnes, 'Parcevals Saga', pp. 53–54.

⁴⁵ Parc ch. 1, p. 110: 'Ver guðhræddr [. . .] Ver lítillátr við góða menn.'

⁴⁶ HomNor, p. 65: 'Nema þer at mér; þviat ec em míuc-lundr ok litillatr í hiarta.' This is the Norse homilist's translation of Matthew 11. 29.

⁴⁷ Cf. Anne Holtsmark, 'Dyd i vn. litt.', *KLNM*, III (1958), cols 386–87. On the ideal of male humility in the Icelandic bishops' sagas, see Bjørn Bandlien, 'Kampen om hegemonisk maskulinitet omkring 1200', *Middelalderforum*, n.s., 2.2 (2002), 33–40, and chapter 4 above.

Later he [the foster-father] let Tristram be taught book-learning and he was most eager to learn. He was taught in the following subjects: the seven main arts; he became acquainted with all kinds of languages; next he learned to play seven stringed instruments so well that there was no one more dignified nor skilled in this than he; in goodness, mildness, courtly conduct, intelligence, wise counsel, and valour there was no one was more richly endowed; and in good manners and distinguished appearance no one was his equal.

At the Irish court, where he appears anonymously, he is greatly admired for these skills, and the king's daughter, Ísönd, wishes to learn as much as possible from this unknown knight. She asks her parents to let her 'come under his learning, because she most wanted to learn to play harp and to write letters and compose poems'.⁴⁸ This sounds more like an education at a cathedral school than the manner in which Norwegian *hirð* members were brought up.

In a way, Parceval and Tristram complement one another as courtly heroes seen through clerical eyes: Tristram is a sensitive harp player and book-learned from his childhood, while Parceval is a knight who starts from scratch, grows as a knight in his lord's and lady's service, but must become humble in order that he may also serve God. That descriptions of Christian virtues and ecclesiastical ideals are so emphasized in the translations indicates that clerics used the *riddarasögur* to promote 'their' values to the Norwegian court. But was that enough to allow those same translators to swallow a strong dose of premarital sexuality and adultery?

The Ideal of Fidelity

The relationship between physical and religious love was discussed by many authors in the High Middle Ages. Andreas Capellanus's *De Amore* contains two widely different concepts of love, arguing on the one hand that love is harmless and pleasing in God's eyes, and on the other hand that it draws people away from God and towards worldly matters. In the *chanteable* entitled *Aucassin et Nicolette* (c. 1200), Aucassin is prepared to give up his salvation just to be with his dear Nicolette. With her by his side, he would gladly go to hell, for he will be in good company: 'the fair clerks and the fair knights who are slain in the tourney and the great wars, and the stout archer and the loyal man. With them will I go. And there go the fair and courteous ladies, who have friends, two or three, together with their wedded lords. And there pass the gold and the silver, the ermine and all rich furs, harpers and minstrels, and the happy of the world.'⁴⁹ Few would go that far for the sake of love even though, at the

⁴⁸ Trist ch. 30, p. 38: 'kóma sér undir kynningar hans, þvíat hun vill fyrst nema hörpuslátt ok at rita bréf ok dikta'.

⁴⁹ *Aucassin and Nicolette*, in *Aucassin and Nicolette and other Mediaeval Romances and Legends*, trans. by Eugene Mason (London: Dent, 1958), p. 6 (ch. VI).

beginning of the fourteenth century, Dante Alighieri gave those who had been lustful in love their own circle in the *Inferno* (Canto V). This indicates the potential danger love could pose to lovers; they could squander their salvation.

Chrétien de Troyes indirectly commented on the discussion of his time regarding love in his *Le Conte del Graal*, which clearly shows that a knight's total devotion to ladies and love could overshadow the religious quest, a quest which Chrétien believed should take precedence over love of women. *Parcevals saga*, for its part, neglects to address this problem, although it must have been far from unknown to the translator. In *Barlaams ok Josaphats saga*, thought to have been translated around 1250 on the initiative of the king's son Hákon ungi, stresses the ideal of chastity. This comes out especially clearly in the pagan wizard Theodas's ploy to trap the Christian prince Josaphat. To get Josaphat to desert his faith and his vow of chastity to God, Theodas has all Josaphat's servants replaced with the most beautiful women. After all, reasons Theodas, there 'is nothing in this world that brings such change and transformation in young men's minds as womanly beauty and the sight of them'.⁵⁰ Of all the tests of his faith, this is the worst for Josaphat. Only by stirring up his love for God in opposition to sensual love is he able to keep his body pure.

Despite this latent friction between the ideal of chastity and courtly love, it seems as if both concepts existed side by side at the Norwegian court. Venus, the goddess of love, is condemned as the queen of whores in *Barlaams ok Josaphats saga*, but hears people's prayers for love in *Pamphilúss saga*.⁵¹ The relationship between the ideal of love and the sinful aspects of extramarital sexuality are left palpably unexplained in the other *riddarasögur* as well. The translator of *Parcevals saga* clearly tried to portray the relationship between Parceval and Blankiflúr as chaste before their marriage. In Chrétien's *Le Conte del Graal*, their first night in the same bed can be interpreted in either a chaste or a carnal way: 'She allowed him to kiss her, and I do not think he was displeased. Thus, all night long until the approach of morning, they lay beside each other, their mouths touching. That night she knew this much consolation: arm clasped in arm, their mouths touching, they slept until daybreak.' The translator, however, did not leave his readers in doubt: 'and thus they lay all that night in each other's arms, with kisses and embraces until daylight, *without any sin*.'⁵² The Norse translator did not want to complicate Parceval's premarital relationship; their love is faithful and chaste, free of sin.

⁵⁰ Barl, p. 142: 'Sa er engi lutr i heíminum, er sua stnyr, eða hvervir ungra manna hug, sem kvenna ferð, oc þeirra asyn'. A similar logic is found in the story of the conversion of Pelagia (Barl, pp. 77–79). Love is only once depicted as good in *Barlaams saga*, when a young man leaves all his property to live in a poor state with his beloved and her father (Barl, pp. 67–68).

⁵¹ Barl, p. 128; Pamph, p. 97.

⁵² *The Story of the Grail*, in *The Complete Romances of Chrétien de Troyes*, trans. by David Staines (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 365; Parc ch. 8, p. 134: 'og svá lágu þau alla þá nátt, hvárt í annars faðmi með kossum ok halsföngum allt til þess er dagr var án alla synd'. (My emphasis.)

In *Tristrams saga*, the situation of the hero's extramarital affair and the moral aspect are much more tangled. Tristram and Ísönd seem to receive divine help every time they are about to be caught, but Brother Robert also has a clear tendency to call their trysts 'sinful', a term that is rather too difficult to avoid after Ísönd marries Tristram's uncle: the relationship involves both adultery and incest.⁵³

A similar equivocal relationship to idealized love and sinful sexuality is found in *Strengleikar*. In *Desire*, the handsome and noble knight has a relationship with a mysterious woman he meets in the forest. In this case it is clear that the lovers have done more than kiss: 'they played as it pleased them.'⁵⁴ Some time later, Desire goes to a hermit to be shriven and confesses 'his sins and his dealings with his beloved and how he first laid hand on her'.⁵⁵ He is nevertheless not terribly repentant, as he goes right back and continues his affair. His lady-love, however, has become angry with Desire for going to confession without her knowledge: 'Our relationship is not a cardinal sin, since I was never married to a man, and I never gave my pledge of matrimony to any man. And you have no wife, and have never been betrothed to any woman. Now, she said, since you went to confession without any reason, you are hardly a wise man, because confession does not help those who refuse to let go of their sins.'⁵⁶ Thus, the affair does not involve adultery (a cardinal sin) since neither of them is married. But at the same time, she points out that confession is pointless as long as they continue their affair and Desire gives no promise of marriage. The woman's argument thus gives a good picture of the idealized and simultaneously sinful dualities in the relationship. For the woman, the personal vow of never-ending faithfulness given in God's sight would have redefined the relationship as a blessed union.

The story of Desire thus addresses the problem that arose when a courtly love relationship did not seek its realization in marriage. Desire's irresolution comes out clearly at the end of the story. The woman herself goes to Desire and 'courts' him. She says to the king of the country: 'Let me first marry my beloved, and he shall then follow me. For I want to live with him according to the laws of God, and he shall live with me the rest of his life, in such a manner that I shall need neither

⁵³ On the relation between religious and courtly ideals in *Tristrams saga*, see Karen Attar, 'Christianity and the Sens of *Tristrams Saga*', in *The Audience of the Sagas: Preprints*, vol. 1, The Eighth International Saga Conference (Gothenburg: Gothenburg University, 1991), pp. 22–31; Jonna Kjær, 'Censure morale et transformations idéologiques dans deux traductions de Chrétien de Troyes: *Ívents Saga* et *Erex Saga*', in *ibid.*, pp. 287–96 (pp. 291–93).

⁵⁴ Str, p. 116: 'ok leco þeim sem þeim licaðe.'

⁵⁵ Str, p. 118: 'ok sagðe honum syndir sínar, ok viðskifti sitt ok unnasto sinnar, hversu hann kom hondum á hana í fyrstu'.

⁵⁶ Str, p. 120: 'ei var viðskifti ockat hofuð synd því at alldre var ec manni pusat, ok alldre gaf ec manni tru mina hiuskaps handzolum, þu at ok enga spusu, ok alldre festir þu þer kono. Nu með því kvað hon at þu leitaðer þer skriftagangs at þarfleyso, þa ertu varla froðr maðr, því at ecki tiao skriftagangr, þeim er eigi vilia af lata syndum sinum.'

confession nor other acts of mercy.⁵⁷ Desire wants both the Church's blessing and an extramarital relationship. That is not a fitting condition for a Christian knight and his beloved. Therefore, the woman in this case has to take the initiative to bring them back into the Christian community by proposing marriage.

In *Tristrams saga*, the extramarital affair seems more noble than the marriage. But that is only on the surface. Great emphasis is laid on the fact that Kanelangres and Blensinbil marry in accordance with God's law after they have fled from King Markis to Bretland: 'he then entered into legal marriage with correct ceremonial.'⁵⁸ Later, when Tristram is accused of being a bastard, he can immediately prove his legitimacy.⁵⁹

More problematic is the relationship between Tristram's marriage and love. Of course, Tristram never gets to marry Ísönd. To forget her, he marries Ísödd instead. The marriage takes place with the will and consent of her family, and the ceremony takes place in a church. But after the wedding Tristram has a crisis of conscience. He cannot forget his dear Ísönd, and he is in agonies on his wedding night: 'Tonight I must sleep here with her as with my wife. I cannot divorce her, because I have married her in the presence of many witnesses. Still I cannot live with her as man and wife unless I break my pledge [to Ísönd] and dishonour my manhood.'⁶⁰ Tristram never manages to consummate his marriage with Ísödd. His pledge of love to Ísönd was simply more compelling, almost matrimonial. The message of *Tristrams saga* is thus that one should marry one's true love: marriage without love (Markis/Ísönd, Tristram/Ísödd) is not a good marriage. One must be true to both Love and God, something that can be realized only in marriage. For Tristram and Ísönd, the dilemma remains unresolved and goes with them to the grave.

In *Strengleikar*, the love between chivalrous men and virtuous women is contrasted time and again with arranged and loveless marriages. Such bonds of love create stronger ties between individuals than formal marriage contracts. In only one

⁵⁷ Str, p. 132: 'latið mic nu first pusaz unnasta minum ok skal hann siðan fylgia mér, því at ec vil bua með honum at guðs logum, ok sva skal hann bua með mér allan sinn aldr, sva at ec þurvi ei skriftagangs ne annarra licna.'

⁵⁸ Trist ch. 14, p. 14: 'ok fekk henna þá með löglegum hjúskap ok rétttri vígslu.'

⁵⁹ Trist ch. 24, p. 28: 'getin að rétttri púsan'. Old Norse *púsa* and *púsan* for 'to marry' and 'wedding' are loanwords from Latin (*sponsa* and *sponsalia*). The first appearances of these words are found in *Tristrams saga*; see Jenny M. Jochens, 'Consent in Marriage: Old Norse Law, Life, and Literature', *Scandinavian Studies*, 58 (1986), 142–76 (pp. 167–69). On other applications of Latin rhetoric and learning in *Tristrams saga*, see Paul Schach, 'The Style and Structure of *Tristrams saga*', in *Scandinavian Studies: Essays Presented to Dr. Henry Goddard Leach on the Occasion of his Eighty-fifth Birthday*, ed. by Carl F. Bayerschmidt and Erik J. Friis (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1965), pp. 63–86.

⁶⁰ Trist ch. 70, p. 84: 'Þessa nótt verð ek hér at sofa svá sem hjá eiginkonum mínni: ek má nú ei við hana skiljast, þvíat ek hefí fest hana mörgum váttum áheyrandi, en þó má ek ei með henni búa, nema ek rjúfa trú mína ok svívirða mínn manndóm.' On the marriage-like relationship between Tristram and Ísönd, see also Trist ch. 84, pp. 96–97.

instance does the translator feel obliged to moralize about the lovers. In *Equitan* King Equitan plans to kill his faithful servant in order to live unhindered with the latter's wife. The Norse translator strongly condemns Equitan's love. It is a threat to important social norms, particularly the bonds of friendship and fidelity between men.⁶¹ The woman is also called 'false' because she conspires with Equitan. In doing so she breaks her vows to her husband and God. She is not even led to do so by true love, but out of desire for riches and status. By exploiting his social position, Equitan undermines the bond of both loyalty and marriage. Equitan and his counsellor's wife are not just adulterers; they also break the bond of love between a couple who have pledged eternal faithfulness to one another.

When the *riddarasögur* are looked at together, it seems as if the Norse translators were trying to minimize the conflict between courtly love and sinful sexuality in relation to their models. The extramarital affairs had to be categorized as sin, but at the same time the value of the unbreakable bond of love before marriage had become so important for clerics in the thirteenth century that it was not condemned. In the previous chapter we saw how the Church's theologians and jurists sought to alter the form and function of marriage in the twelfth century. According to canon law, marriage was to be a holy sacrament which bound a man and a woman together for life. The personal bond between them, not the formal property transactions or family alliances, was the most important part of marriage. Through the *riddarasögur*, a Norwegian audience was presented with an ideology in which love was the cornerstone of marriage, and marriage was the ultimate goal of virtuous, true love.

The pious translator of *Parcevals saga* consciously emphasized this ideal. Chrétien de Troyes never finished his *Le Conte del Graal*, but presumably meant for the Grail, rather than Blanchefleur, to be the end of Perceval's wanderings and education. For the translator, however, the story ends with Parceval marrying Blankiflúr and living happily ever after. He becomes a good king, a godly man, and the father of many children.

Consent

The vow of fidelity between two lovers in the *riddarasögur* is closely connected to the canonical understanding of consent. This comes through most clearly in *Erex saga*. When Erex asks Evida's father for her hand, it is she who has the last word. Evida's father is not at all opposed to the match, but only if 'it is her own will [. . .], because I expect from her that she is no more lacking in intelligence and female accomplishments than she is in beauty. Let her now say forth her will.'⁶² Chrétien de

⁶¹ Str, pp. 78–82.

⁶² Erex, pp. 12–13: 'og aunguom kosti vil eg því meita að gipta þér minna dotter ef það er hennar vilje [. . .] þess væntar mig að af viti og kvennligum listum hafa minn dotter ei síjdur enn vænleik, og núe síege hun sinn vilja.'

Troyes, on the other hand, emphasized that the maiden herself, although pleased, remained completely silent, while her father gave her away.⁶³ This is only one of many examples of women's consent being highlighted in the *riddarasögur* where Chrétien's romance has no such emphasis.⁶⁴ The manuscripts in which *Erex saga* is preserved are late, so an interest in consent may be put down to the Icelandic writer or to a possible thirteenth-century translator. Nevertheless, the emphasis on the woman's consent is striking, but by no means unique in the extant *riddarasögur*.⁶⁵

The ideal was that marriage should be based on love. Forced marriage was portrayed in a very negative light. When it looks as if Ísönd is going to have to marry the false dragon-slayer, she swears she would rather take her own life than marry him. No matter what, she will never give him her consent.⁶⁶

It is worth noting that affairs in which one of the lovers is already married are only portrayed in a positive light when the marriage in question is a loveless, institutional shell. If the woman was forced into marriage and had never loved her husband, her love for a visiting knight is legitimate and courtly.⁶⁷ But if the husband and wife love each other and make vows of fidelity before they wed, an extramarital affair is seen as a betrayal of both the spouse and the sacramental and binding vow of love.⁶⁸ Betrayal of *love* is condemned most strongly, both within and outside of marriage, while the triumph of love over loveless marriage is justified. Thus, the translators made a close connection between the ideology of courtly love and Christian ideals of marriage. Marriage against the woman's will is not just seen as an injustice to the woman and to love, but also a violation of God's law.

Courtly Love in Bergen

Norbert Elias believed that new norms for sexuality and love developed through the centralization of power, a monopoly on violence, and a more complex society. This last factor resulted from a combination of circumstances, not least of which was the rise of a new urban middle class that competed with the warrior aristocracy. If we consider Elias's civilization theory in the light of Bourdieu's distinction theory,

⁶³ Chrétien de Troyes, *Complete Romances*, p. 9.

⁶⁴ See in particular *Erex*, p. 56 and pp. 103–06.

⁶⁵ Jenny Jochens argued that the change was caused by clerical propaganda (Jochens, 'Consent', p. 159), while Marianne Kalinke argued that women's consent was due to an Icelandic tradition of strong women: Kalinke, *King Arthur*, pp. 180–83. My interpretation differs somewhat from both these views.

⁶⁶ *Trist* ch. 37: 'aldri játa ek því'.

⁶⁷ Stories of such unhappy wives are found most frequently in *Strengleikar*, especially in *Guíamar*, *Laustik*, and *Milun*.

⁶⁸ This is the theme of the stories of *Equitan* and *Bisclaret*, both found in *Strengleikar*.

changes of mentality within a social class (*habitus*) presuppose that one must have new groups from which to distinguish oneself. For Bourdieu, another important aspect is that the cultural codes in a social space must be shared with other layers of society, so that those with lower social status accept the definitions of cultural capital promulgated by the leaders in society.⁶⁹ In thirteenth-century Norway, Bergen was the centre we may expect to have had such a social space and where, moreover, fragments of source material have been preserved which shed light on how love could have been used as cultural capital.

Bergen was without doubt one of the largest and most important towns in Norway during the High Middle Ages. As international trade grew, the town grew with it. This was the king's principal seat, and ecclesiastical institutions were also well represented by schools and monasteries. The bustle of activity contributed to a more diverse milieu in Bergen than in other towns in Norway, even though it was modest by European standards. Knut Helle distinguishes three social layers in medieval Bergen.⁷⁰ At the bottom were the workers, the servants, and the poor. Artisans, small-time merchants, and others who were expected to pay town taxes occupied a middle rank. At the top were the property owners. This was the group who enjoyed the most privileges in the Town Law, and they included both persons connected to the Church and the king's liegemen. Helle points out, however, that the aristocracy surrounding the *hirð* in Bergen were less distanced than European nobility from town life and mercantile business. Both clerics and aristocrats in Bergen were involved in trade and shipping.⁷¹

An interesting source for the urban population's interest in and use of the new ideals of love in the *riddarasögur* is a corpus of runic inscriptions carved on sticks of wood. Since the early 1960s, about seven hundred remarkably well-preserved runic inscriptions have been found in Bergen, most of which were discovered in the excavations following a fire in the historic Bryggen district on 4 July 1955.⁷² These finds prove that runes were used as an everyday alphabet for writing letters, brief messages, prayers, coarse insults, and love poetry. The inscriptions that have to do with

⁶⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge, 1984).

⁷⁰ Knut Helle, *Kongssete og kjøpstad: Fra opphavet til 1536*, Bergen bys historie, 1 (Bergen: Alma Mater, 1982), pp. 449–61.

⁷¹ Helle, *Kongssete*, p. 452.

⁷² The dating of the runic inscriptions is partly based on the layers in which they were found. There were three great fires in Bergen in the relevant period: in 1198, 1248, and 1332; see Helle, *Kongssete*, pp. 123–26; James E. Knirk, 'Tillegg om funntilhøve, brannlagsrelasjon og datering', in *Norges innskrifter med de yngre runer*, vol. VI.2, ed. by Ingrid Sanness Johnsen (Oslo: Norsk historisk kjeldeskrift-institutt, 1990), pp. 245–48. There is also a debate about the existence and extent of a fire in 1225/30, for which there is only dubious archaeological evidence; see Ashbjørn Herteig, 'The "Forgotten" Fire in Bergen', *The Bryggen Papers, Supplementary Series*, 6 (1998), 157–67.

love and sexuality vary in nature. Latin love poetry, two skaldic verses in *dróttkvætt* metre, and other fragments of lyrical expressions of love have been preserved, as well as inscriptions with more ‘vulgar’ content.

The longer Latin love poems can more than likely be regarded as an aspect of the clerical importation of new ideals of love.⁷³ A particularly exciting example is from a stick with runes carved on three sides (N603). This inscription testifies to a use of European *vagant* lyric, a type of poetry that could praise the joys of wine, criticize the double standards of the Church, and delight in a woman’s beauty. This poetry has traditionally been attributed to itinerant clerics without permanent posts or student milieus, particularly around the universities in Paris and England. Norwegian students were also found at these centres of learning. The fragments of verse on the rune-stick are taken from the two poems *Amor habet superos* and *Axe Phebus aureo*, both from the famous collection of poems *Carmina Burana* from the beginning of the thirteenth century.

Amor habet superos describes the pious poet’s growing love for a girl. All he wants is to give her a kiss and a hug. Everything else the poet dreams of doing with her one day must wait until she is older. The lover will take care of his delicate flower until she as is ripe as a grape. He scorns both married women and whores; it is pure and chaste love that he praises.⁷⁴ It is uncertain whether the carver of N603 knew the entire poem as it is preserved in the *Carmina Burana*. The inscription does not follow the manuscript version of the poem word for word, and there is no sign that there was a written version in Bergen. Apparently, the rune-stick was carved from memory. N603 contains the first part of stanza 4 and fragments of stanza 9. Here, the carver used the Latin love-poem to say ‘I am becoming inflamed with the fires (of love) for the exquisite maiden, and grow daily (more) in love with her.’⁷⁵ The excerpt from stanza 9 calls upon all to be careful with his youthful love.

The last line on N603 is a fragment from the poem *Axe Phebus aureo*. This poem is about unlucky and impossible love, a love that drives the lover mad. The fragments from N603 are taken from a part of the poem inspired by the myth of Tereus’s

⁷³ Runic inscriptions in Latin from Bryggen are printed in *Norges innskrifter med de yngre runer*, vol. VI.1, ed. by Aslak Liestøl (Oslo: Norsk historisk kjeldeskrift-institutt, 1980). There is a summary of this volume in English: see Karin Fjellhammer Seim, ‘Runic Inscriptions in Latin’, *The Bryggen Papers, Supplementary Series*, 2 (1988), 24–65. Inscriptions printed in the series *Norges innskrifter med de yngre runer* (NIYR) are designated N+number. Runic inscriptions from Bergen not published in NIYR are designated B+number. Unpublished inscriptions from the rest of Norway are designated A+number.

⁷⁴ I use the edition in *Love Lyrics from the Carmina Burana*, ed. and trans. by P. G. Walsh (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), pp. 94–96. One of the relevant stanzas, st. 4, is not found in the main manuscript of *Carmina Burana*, the *Codex Buranus* (Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 4660), but only found in a contemporary manuscript now in Florence (Florence, Biblioteca Laurenziana, Edili 197) of the thirteenth century.

⁷⁵ NIYR, VI.1, 4; translation from Seim, ‘Runic Inscriptions’, p. 24. N603 was found in the layer between 1248 and 1332.

rape of his wife's sister Philomena. He cuts out her tongue to prevent her from telling her sister what has happened. Philomena instead weaves her story in a tapestry so that her sister can see what has happened. The sisters kill Tereus's son and serve him to Tereus as a meal. At the end, all are changed into birds that sing of the joys and sorrows of love. The myth centres on the tragic consequences of a man's impossible but overwhelming desire for a woman.⁷⁶ N603 bears only fragments of this myth: it refers only to Philomena's wails as she struggles against Tereus (st. 2b) and to desperate struggles in general.⁷⁷

The rune-stick is a lone example of *vagant* lyric in the Northern latitudes. There are otherwise few traces of Latin love poetry from Bryggen. There may be a snippet of a poem about worldly love on N606: *dekor amenita[s]* ('ornament for the beautiful scenery') and *flos amoris* ('flower of love') are carved on that piece. These inscriptions may nevertheless be more likely to refer to the Virgin Mary than to a woman from Bergen.⁷⁸ On the opposite side of the stick is yet another inscription: the first words of a stanza of King Haraldr harðráði's *gamanvísur*.⁷⁹ This poem is not just about love; the refrain was about a woman in Russia, presumably Ellisif, who did not want King Haraldr.

The Latin inscriptions show that among the diligent students who travelled south to learn Latin grammar and Church law, some also became interested in love poetry. Kjell Ivar Vannebo estimates that during the High Middle Ages there were around two hundred people in Bergen at any given time who could read and write Latin.⁸⁰ Aslak Liestøl regards the milieu around the cathedral chapter in Bergen as the most probable origin of these Latin runic inscriptions.⁸¹ The majority of this group would

⁷⁶ The story is best known through Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, 6.426–674. Chrétien de Troyes made a poem based on this myth, where he seems to have been most interested in discussing Tereus's actions as violations of canon law, while Philomena was as much to blame for the seduction as Tereus himself; see Kathryn Gravdal, 'Chrétien de Troyes, Gratian, and the Medieval Romance of Sexual Violence', *Signs*, 17 (1992), 558–85 (pp. 580–81). The poem is translated in Patricia Terry, *The Honeysuckle and the Hazel Tree: Medieval Stories of Men and Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 31–74.

⁷⁷ The Latin poem is printed in *Love Lyrics*, ed. and trans. by Walsh, pp. 39–41. The third line on N603 reverses the order of the stanzas in the *Codex Buranus*, and it seems likely that the writer just wrote it from his memory rather than from a manuscript.

⁷⁸ *NIYR*, vi.1, 14; Seim, 'Runic Inscriptions', p. 29.

⁷⁹ Karin Fjellhammer Seim, 'Fragment av Harald Harðrádes gamanvísur overlevert i runer på Bryggen i Bergen', *Maal og Minne*, 1986, 30–41; see also Seim, 'Runic Inscriptions', p. 29.

⁸⁰ Kjell Ivar Vannebo, 'Hva vet vi om lese- og skriveferdigheten i Norge i middelalderen?', *Maal og Minne*, 1994, 5–23; see also Helle, *Kongssete*, pp. 626–33; Sverre Bagge, 'Nordiske universitetsbesøk i utlandet før 1660: Norge', in *Nordiska historikermötet i Jyväskylä*, vol. 1 (Jyväskylä: Jyväskylän yliopisto, 1981), pp. 141–63; Oluf Kolsrud, *Presteutdaningi i Noreg, Norvegia sacra*, 21 (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1962), pp. 20–40.

⁸¹ *NIYR*, vi.1, 8–9.

surely also have known runes, and the carver of N606 was also familiar with Old Norse skaldic poetry. The Latin runic inscriptions indicate that such students also used their contact with other countries to import secular love poetry independent of the *riddarasögur*. They reinforce the impression of a strong interest among prominent townspeople in love's power over men and women.

At least fragments of these Latin love traditions were likely also known outside learned circles. In Bergen it appears that Virgil's famous words *Omnia vincit amor, nos et cedamus Amori* (Love conquers all, let us too yield to love) were especially popular.⁸² It has often been thought to be a simple writing exercise for students in the town, or an expression of the love between God and man.⁸³ This is because a reliquary from Fortun Church dating to the first half of the thirteenth century has the very words *Amor vincit omnia* carved on it.⁸⁴

Arne Larsen has argued that the quotation may have had a function at betrothals and weddings.⁸⁵ His argument turns on a woman's shoe found between the burn layers of 1198 and 1248 upon which *Amor vincit omnia* is embroidered in runes.⁸⁶ Larsen extrapolates that the other shoe would have had the other half of the quotation, *et nos cedamus Amori* embroidered on it. In all probability, then, the shoes were a wedding gift. A finger ring found in Vestfold dated to the thirteenth century reinforces this theory. It bears the same quotation engraved in Roman majuscule and was most probably used as a betrothal gift to a woman, perhaps on the occasion that the giver and recipient made vows of mutual fidelity?⁸⁷ The Virgil quotation, thus, was used for purposes other than mere practice in runic writing and was closely connected with the ceremony of betrothal. The quotation is as brief and simple as the

⁸² N605; B145. It is taken from *Bucolica*, Ecloga 10.69. It was also used by Ovid; see *Amores*, 3.11B.2. The phrase was popular in the Middle Ages, and most often used independently of the context of Virgil's Eclogue.

⁸³ *NIYR*, vi.1, 12–13; Aslak Liestøl, Wolfgang Krause, and Jón Helgason, 'Drottkvætt-vers fra Bryggen i Bergen', *Maal og Minne*, 1962, 98–108; James E. Knirk, 'Learning to Write with Runes in Medieval Norway', in *Medeltida skrift- och språkkultur*, ed. by Inger Lindell, *Opuscula*, 2 (Stockholm: Runica et Mediaevalia, 1994), pp. 169–212 (p. 198).

⁸⁴ N303, *NIYR*, iv (1957), 79–82. It might be appropriate to recall that Virgil was seen as nearly a Christian in the Middle Ages, as exemplified in Dante's *Inferno*. The prime reason for this was that the fourth Eclogue of *Bucolica* was perceived as a prophecy of Christ.

⁸⁵ Arne J. Larsen, 'Innskrifter – med tegn og bokstaver: Om den uovervinnelige kjærligheten', *Viking*, 60 (1997), 95–108 (pp. 99–101).

⁸⁶ B605; also mentioned in *NIYR*, vi.2 (1990), 228, and in Arne J. Larsen, *Footwear from the Gullskoen Area of Bryggen*, The Bryggen Papers, Main series, 4 (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1992), pp. 81–84.

⁸⁷ Alf Hammervold, *Dactyliotheca Norvegica Medioevalis, Fingerringer fra middelalderen i Norge: En undersøkelse av fingerringer fra middelalderen og ringer av middelaldertype*, *Varia*, 40 (Oslo: Universitetets Oldsaksamling, 1997), pp. 66, 136–37 (cat. no 84). There is also a Swedish example of such a ring; see *NIYR*, vi.1, 12.

very common inscription ‘Ave Maria’; those who otherwise read only Norse inscriptions could also understand the meaning. The embroidery on the shoes meant that a woman could go around wearing a tangible memento of the good and courtly bond of love of which she was part, a love that bound her to the new thinking of her time. The quotation may thus have functioned as an easily understandable reference to the love stories in the *riddarasögur*.

Do the Old Norse inscriptions differ from the Latin ones? If so, the difference is small indeed. *Amor vincit* is written on the same stick as an Old Norse love poem (B145). Some rune-sticks have also been found that indicate foreign influence on Old Norse love poetry. On B496 we find two short love poems that resemble Latin *impossibilia*.⁸⁸ The first poem was probably carved by a Norwegian: ‘The raven will, before I discard the wise [lady], [be] white [as] the snows that lie [on the mountains].’⁸⁹ Someone else, probably an Icelander, writes: ‘I love a man’s wife thus, that the wide mountains will start swaying [before I forget her?]. [Noble] lady, we love each other so much that the earth bursts.’⁹⁰ A parallel to these two verses is found on B644: ‘I love a man’s wife thus, that the fire seems cold; and I am the friend of this woman.’⁹¹

It may be difficult to ascertain whether these runic poems stem from Norse tradition or were inspired by contemporary Latin poetry.⁹² We should remember that *impossibilia* were also known in love poetry attributed to the skald Kormákr Ögmundarson, who lived in the tenth century. On the other hand, the carvers of B496 and B644 show a greater interest in love’s effect on the soul than Kormákr’s verse. That it is another man’s wife the carver loves does not seem to be meant as a challenge, but to show how problematic the poet’s feelings of love are for him. This is poetry in traditional Norse form with kennings, but it was part of the courtly discourse of love.

Let us look at an example which shows this even more clearly. On B255 there is a poem which when transcribed into verse format reads as follows:

⁸⁸ James E. Knirk, ‘Kunne en gotlending finne romantikk i middelalderens Bergen? Kjærlighetsdikt med runer fra Bryggen i Bergen’, in *Archiv und Geschichte im Ostseeraum: Festschrift für Sten Körner*, ed. by Robert Bohn, Hain Rebas, and Tryggve Siltberg, *Studia septemtrionalia*, 3 (Frankfurt a.M.: Lang, 1997), pp. 25–37.

⁸⁹ B494 b), from Gullskoen in Bergen, before 1332: **:ram en skal apr en ek hoskge hamna huit er su miol er liggr** (*Ramn skal áðr en ek horskri hamna hvitr [sem] sú mjöll er liggr [á fjöllum]*).

⁹⁰ B494 a): **anek: sua: kono: manz: kipa: taka: fioll: uip: lægiumk: sua: hugia: ringæipr: at: iorþ: sÞrinkr:** (*Ann ek svá konu manns víða taka fjöll [há] við leggjumk svá hugi á, hring-reið, at jörð springr*).

⁹¹ B644 a), from Søndre Søstergården, before 1198: **aneksua: konomansatmer: þykikaltræltr: enekemuinr: uifspæsua** (*Ann ek svá konu manns at mér þykkir kaldr eldr. En ek em vinr vífs þessa*).

⁹² Karin Fjellhammer Seim, ‘A Review of the Runic Material’, *The Bryggen Papers, Supplementary Series*, 2 (1988), 10–23 (p. 15).

Vár kennir [mér] víra
 vitr úglaðan sitja.
 Eir nemr opt ok stórum
 qluns grundar mik blundi.⁹³

The wise woman (*Vár víra*) teaches me to sit unhappily; the woman deprives my sleep often and much.

Sleeplessness is, of course, a well-known symptom of love in a man. But we should also note the name of the goddess in the first kenning for ‘woman’. In Snorri’s *Edda*, Vár is connected with the promises men and women make to one another: ‘She listens to the oaths that people swear, and the agreements women and men make to each other. These agreements are thus called “várar”. And she takes revenge on deceivers.’⁹⁴ In *Þrymskviða*, Vár is explicitly connected with the contracting of marriages. When Þrymr is to be wed to Freyja (Þórr in disguise), he says, ‘Let us now be married / in the hands of Vár.’ In *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar* it is said that Helgi and Sváva promised one another eternal faithfulness: *veituz vára*. The verb itself is connected to Old Germanic *wær*, which can be translated as ‘truthful promise’.⁹⁵ In the two Eddic poems, therefore, Vár herself watches over the marriage vows, and in both cases they are made with the woman’s consent.⁹⁶ It is worthwhile to note that these are two of the later Eddic poems: *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar* is dated as late as c. 1200.⁹⁷ The concept of the significance of mutual vows in love and betrothal may have been revived after courtly ideals became more widely known. Thus, the otherwise little-known goddess Vár could have been more actively used in Old Norse love poetry. B255 can therefore be interpreted to mean that the man is sleepless because a woman has broken her marriage vows to him. The content of the poem fits well with the courtly discourse in Bergen in the thirteenth century, but the poet chose to express himself in a traditional way.

A similar blend of old and new can also be seen in B145. This inscription contains the beginnings of the phrase *Amor vincit omnia*, but a whole verse in the

⁹³ B255 c)–d): **uar kennir uira uitr ugllaþan sitita air nemr optok storom alunns grunntar mik blunnti**. Translation after Jonna Louis-Jensen, ‘To halvstrofer fra Bryggen i Bergen’, in *Festskrift til Alfred Jakobsen*, ed. by Hagland and others, pp. 106–09 (pp. 107–08). Liestøl, ‘Runer’, pp. 29–32 has a slightly different interpretation.

⁹⁴ SnE, p. 39: ‘hon lupir æipa mana ok einka mal, er veita sin amilli konur ok karlar; því heita þva mal varar, honhefnir ok þeim er brigða.’

⁹⁵ Anne Holtsmark, ‘Vár’, *KLNM*, XIX (1975), cols 529–30.

⁹⁶ Britt-Mari Näsström has pointed out that the Swedish term *vårdtecken* still is in use in connection to the handing over of ring: Britt-Mari Näsström, *Frøya: Den store gudinnen i nord* (Oslo: Pax, 1998), p. 120.

⁹⁷ Theodore M. Andersson, ‘*Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar* and European Bridal-Quest Narrative’, *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 84 (1985), 51–75.

traditional *dróttkvætt* metre is also carved on the stick. Interpretations of the text have varied, but the first part is reasonably certain:

Fell til friðrar þellu
fárligar mér árla
fiskáls festibála
forn byrr hamarnorna.⁹⁸

The old burden of the mountain-norns [mind/love] turned early to the beautiful and dangerous fish-eel's firm fire [pine of gold=woman].

The second half of the stanza is more difficult to interpret, but is about either how the woman keeps hold of the man or that the love for the woman will be held fast.⁹⁹ The rest of line C reads 'Omnia vincit amor et nos cedamus amoris'. On line D of the stick, someone less skilled in runes has tried to carve the same phrase but with some mistakes. The possibility thus exists that the entire inscription was an exercise for students, perhaps in connection with the cathedral school in Bergen. This brings out two significant points: that love was a popular theme among students in Bergen, and that love poetry was no longer connected to the forces of chaos, as we have seen it was earlier. Even if the whole inscription was meant as an exercise, it shows that it was in the clerical, learned milieu that both Norse and Latin love poetry were being put to use. That the Virgil quotation was put at the end of a *dróttkvætt* stanza shows that traditional forms could be coupled with new ideals of love in the first half of the thirteenth century.¹⁰⁰

Finally, we will look at the shorter runic inscriptions. These succinct messages have often been localized to taverns — or perhaps houses of prostitution — in Bergen. 'Kiss me' and the phrase *unn mér, ann ek þér* (love me, I love you) appear

⁹⁸ B145 a)–b): **fell· til· friðrar· þellu· farleghrar· mr· arla· fiskall· festibala· forn· byrhamar | norna**. The first edition of this inscription, with various interpretations and suggestions of translations, was printed in Liestøl, Krause, and Jón Helgason, 'Drottkvætt-vers'. For slightly different interpretations, see Roberta Frank, *Old Norse Court Poetry: The Dróttkvætt Stanza*, *Islandica*, 42 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), pp. 169–70; Knirk, 'Kunne en gotlending', pp. 31–33. The stick was found at Søndre Engelgården and can be dated 1198–1248.

⁹⁹ The first interpretation is by Krause, the second by Jón Helgason, see Liestøl, Krause, and Jón Helgason, 'Drottkvætt-vers', pp. 102–06. The text is as follows, B145 b)–c): **þæimuihdi· heuirþundar·þornluþrs· iolun· buþar· gloumar· gyghiartouma | galdrsfastleghe· haldet**.

¹⁰⁰ B265 is another example of the use of traditional skaldic poetry in thirteenth-century Bergen. The inscription is an almost verbatim quotation from *Hamðismál* 21; see Liestøl, 'Runer', p. 35. B257 alludes to the love magic of *Skirnismál*, while the poem in N606 is similar to Haraldr harðráði's *gamansvísur*. There is also an example from Trondheim: N829 is similar to a stanza in *Egils saga*; see James E. Knirk, 'Runes from Trondheim and a Stanza from Egill Skalla-Grimsson', in *Studien zur Altgermanischen: Festschrift für Heinrich Beck*, ed. by Heiko Uecker, *Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde*, 11 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1994), pp. 411–21.

many times.¹⁰¹ A few of the shorter messages are typically coarse, which in practice means that the whole text is the word *fub*. These are the first three letters in the runic alphabet, but also the word for ‘vulva’. These inscriptions are generally interpreted as medieval laddish humour.¹⁰² Among the coarser inscriptions we also find examples of men boasting of their female conquests. B39 is relatively typical: ‘Smeðr penetrated Vigðis of the Snældubeins.’¹⁰³ Another reads: ‘The wise lady had to give up her virginity for her lover; still she is reckoned a virgin among men.’¹⁰⁴ This half-stanza seems to boast of an affair no one knew about, but which is being announced by the instigator. The contrast to the ideal of preserving maidenhood found in N603 is great.

¹⁰¹ B17; B371; B465; B535; B556. B118 adds the name of the addressee: **unþu· mæR ank· þær· gunnildr· kyskmik· kanekþik**. In Norse: *Unn þú mér, ann ek þér, Gunnhildr, kyss mik, kann ei þik* (Love you me, I love you. Gunnhildr, kiss me! I know you well); cf. Liestøl, ‘Runer’, p. 22. B257 (after 1332) ends with ‘love me as you [love] yourself’. This inscription has clear magical connotations with the use of the curse of Skírnir in *Skírnismál*. Magic in runic sticks in medieval Norway is discussed in Karin Fjellhammer Seim, ‘Var futharken en magisk formel i middelalderen? Testing av en hypotese mot innskrifter fra Bryggen i Bergen’, in *Proceedings of the Third International Symposium on Runes and Runic Inscriptions*, ed. by James E. Knirk, Runrön, 9 (Uppsala: University of Uppsala, 1994), pp. 279–300; Else Mundal and Gro Steinsland, ‘Kvinner og medisinsk magi’, in *Kvinnors rosengård: Medeltidskvinnors liv och hälsa, lust och barnafödande*, ed. by Hedda Gunneng and others, Skriftserie från Centrum för kvinnoforskning vid Stockholms Universitet, 1 (Stockholm: University of Stockholm, 1989), pp. 97–121; Stephen A. Mitchell, ‘Anaphrodisiac Charms in the Nordic Middle Ages: Impotence, Infertility, and Magic’, *Norveg*, 41.1 (1998), 19–42; Dror Segev, *Medieval Magic and Magicians – in Norway and Elsewhere: Based upon 12th–15th Centuries Manuscript and Runic Evidence*, Skriftserie, 2 (Oslo: Centre for Viking and Medieval Studies, 2001).

¹⁰² On these inscriptions, see Knirk, ‘Kunne en gotlending’; Karin Fjellhammer Seim, ‘Om garpegenitiven som i stedet var et kjønnsorgan og and “utuktige” leksemer i norske runeinnskrifter’, in *Språket er målet: Festskrift til Egil Pettersen*, ed. by Jarle Bondevik and others (Bergen: Alma Mater, 1997), pp. 178–87. There is a convenient list of runic inscriptions concerning love and sex in Kristiina Püttsepp, ‘Kjærlighet på pinne: Vertshusinnskrifter fra norske middelalderbyer’ (unpublished master’s thesis, University of Oslo, 2003), pp. 87–110. Perhaps the most famous of these inscriptions is B434, which translates: ‘Jón silken-*fub* owns me, and Guðormr *fub*-licker inscribed me, and Jón *fub*-kuli interprets me’. All three are known from other sources; Jón silki was even a *lenðr maðr*, ‘landed man’ or baron. They may hypothetically have met in Bergen around 1200, but the stick is found above the fire layer of 1248. It is more likely that the scribe used known persons either for fun or to dishonour their memory; cf. James E. Knirk, ‘Kung Sverre, biskop Ragnar, Tore Fager ... Historiska personer i norska runinskrifter’, in *Runmärkt: Från brev till klotter*, ed. by Solbritt Benneth and others (Stockholm: Carlssons, 1994), pp. 97–104 (p. 102). See also the list of *fub*-inscriptions in Püttsepp.

¹⁰³ B39: **smiþur saarþ uiktisi | af snæltu benum** (*Smidr sarð Vigðisi af snældubeinum*). See Knirk, ‘Kunne en gotlending’, p. 27; cf. B347 and B390.

¹⁰⁴ B111, cf. Louis-Jensen, ‘To halvstrofer’, p. 109.

The runic material from Bryggen shows that different attitudes to love and sexuality existed in Bergen in the thirteenth century. We find both traditional, heroic concepts connected to male challenge, and an interest in love's influence on one's emotional life. This latter type of inscription is related to courtly love through the focus on the psychological aspect of love and a connection between faithful love and marriage.

In recent years, runologists have considered it probable that priests and monks contributed to the expansion of runic knowledge in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.¹⁰⁵ The shoe with a quotation about love embroidered on it originated in the highest social stratum of the town and may be a signal that love's power could have been used as a sign of an aristocratic lifestyle. The quotation *Amor vincit omnia* was such a widespread phrase in the town that we can interpret it as a visible and easily recognizable symbol for the new courtly ideals for both the secular and the ecclesiastical elite.

The broad access to a popular alphabet, runes, may have contributed to the fact that the difference between courtly expressions of love and the traditional statements of power over other men's women was clearer for the people of Bergen. Also, the spheres of the *hirð* and Church could overlap with those of the tavern and brothel, so we would be wise to avoid making hard and fast social distinctions between types of inscriptions. But the runic inscriptions from Bryggen in Bergen show that courtly ideals of love were known to the town's population, and that the aristocracy could seek connection to those ideals as a social marker separating them from burghers and farmers.

Consent Triumphs, but Does Love?

The clerics' learning was a necessary condition for the existence of translated *rid-darasögur*. In this section, we will take a closer look at how the sagas' message was received by the Norwegian *hirð*. Are there signs that the principles of courtly love were being internalized? If so, in what form? How did royal power and aristocracy react to the norm of women's consent at a time when the significance of marriage for property transfer, territorial claims, and inheritance was only increasing?

Hákon Hákonarson and the New Knightly Ideals

Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar was written by the Icelander Sturla Þórðarson shortly after the King's death in 1263. The saga's source value as a historical document has traditionally been considered high. Sturla consulted written sources and eyewitness accounts. However, we must remember that the saga idealizes King Hákon's life.

¹⁰⁵ Helmer Gustavson, 'Runsk latinitet', in *Medeltida skrift- och språkkultur*, ed. by Lindell, pp. 61–77 (pp. 75–76); Rune Palm, 'Vem kunde läsa och skriva runor under medeltiden?', in *Runmärkt*, ed. by Benneth and others, pp. 53–61 (pp. 59–61); Knirk, 'Kung Sverre', pp. 103–04.

Sturla's depiction of Hákon's childhood and youth shows some signs of having been written in the 1260s and reveals little of the mentalities at the beginning of the century.¹⁰⁶ In the course of Hákon's lifetime, the Norwegian kingship was consolidated and a new ideology of kingship developed. A new sense of right and justice took root in the centre of power; there was a more peaceful relationship between the Crown and the Church, an expansion of Norwegian tributary lands, and a new cultural flowering.

It is therefore striking that Sturla's account of King Hákon's youth is reminiscent of Tristram's upbringing and schooling. The saga tells that Hákon learned to read when he was seven years old. Earl Hákon, with whom he lived at the time, thinks this is good enough. But when the young Hákon also learns to sing, the Earl says: 'You shall not learn song; you shall be neither priest nor bishop.'¹⁰⁷ This remark points to the latent conflict between traditional and courtly ideals of kingship. That Sturla defends the arts of playing and singing in *Hákonar saga* does appear to be due to his wish to show that King Hákon stood for a new kind of kingship from his earliest years.

King Hákon himself wished to encourage new chivalric ideals in Norway. Hákon is named as patron for five of the translated *riddarasögur* (*Strengleikar*, *Tristrams saga*, *Mottuls saga*, *Ívents saga*, and *Elis saga ok Rósamundar*). Many other works were probably translated during his lifetime (*Parcevals saga*, *Erex saga*, *Pamphilúss saga*, *Flóres saga ok Blankiflúr*, *Partalopa saga*, *Karlamagnús saga*, and *Barlaams ok Josaphats saga*).¹⁰⁸ The kings in the translated sagas are, in a surprising number of cases, more idealized than in the originals.¹⁰⁹ One reason for Hákon's interest in European romances was his outward-looking cultural politics, his goal being to become one of Europe's leading royal houses. Another reason may be that he was trying — in collaboration with the Church — to change the behaviour of his *hirð*.

¹⁰⁶ Recent studies on *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* include Narve Bjørge, 'Om skriftlege kjelder for Hákonar saga', *Historisk Tidsskrift*, 46 (1967), 185–229; Ólafía Einarisdóttir, 'Om samtidssagaens kildeverdi belyst ved Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar', *alvissmál*, 5 (1995), 29–80; Sverre Bagge, *From Gang Leader to the Lord's Anointed: Kingship in 'Sverris saga' and 'Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar'*, The Viking Collection, 8 (Odense: Odense University Press, 1996), pp. 91–155; cf. Hans Jacob Orning, 'Hákon Håkonsson, Skule Bårdsson og norsk statsdannelse i første halvdel av 1200-tallet', *Historisk Tidsskrift*, 76 (1997), 2–19.

¹⁰⁷ HH ch. 5, p. 11: 'Ekki skaltú söng nema, þú skalt hvárki vera prestur né biskup.' The priest Beni experienced a similar kind of disrespect because he used to perform *leikr*. Because of this he was regarded as a fool (*dára*); cf. HH ch. 34, p. 35. This negative attitude may not, however, reflect spite against the learning of songs suited for the Church, but perhaps jesting verses in the manner of a jongleur. Beni was later to become a pretender to the throne.

¹⁰⁸ A similar translation programme under royal protection is found in Castile under King Alfonso X (1221–84); cf. Victor Almazan, 'Translations at the Castilian and Norwegian Courts in the Thirteenth Century: Parallels and Patterns', *Mediaeval Scandinavia*, 12 (1988), 213–32. Kristin, daughter of King Hákon, married a brother of Alfonso X; see below.

¹⁰⁹ Schach, 'Style and Structure', pp. 75–76; Barnes, 'Riddarasögur and Mediaeval European Literature'; Kalinke, *King Arthur*, pp. 28–45.

This aim is expressed in the Old Norse *Konungs skuggsjá* ('King's Mirror'), written in the 1250s:

Enn firi því heitir kongz skuggsio, at þar er iafnviðst ritad um konga sidu sem annara manna enda er hann hæstur ad nafni og a hann ad fylgia fegurstum sidum og hans hird og allir hans þionustu menn at allar adrar þiodir taki af þeim god dæmi til ráðvendi og godrar meðferdar og allra annarra hæverskra sida. Svo a kongur hver sem eirn at síá i þessa skuggsion og lijta fyst a síálfs síjns sidu, og þar næst allra annara þeira sem undir honum eru, sæma þá alla er goda sidu hafa, en temia þá til godra sida med aga er eigi meiga ognarlaus numid fá.

And the book is called 'King's Mirror' because it is written as much about the king's manners as that of other men. And he is of the highest name and should follow the fairest manners, both he and his court and all his servants, so that everyone else may take from them good examples for honesty, good manners, and all other forms of courtly conduct. Thus every king should look into this mirror, and then first consider his own manners, and then the manners of all others that are under him. He shall honour all those with good manners, but fiercely tame to good manners those who cannot be taught without threats.¹¹⁰

Thus, the king was to be an example for the *hirð* in good conduct. Did that also include courtly behaviour? Was Hákon content to translate romances just for the sake of fashion? We find few direct signs of a courtly love culture at King Hákon's court. This may be interpreted to mean that there were other aspects of knightly culture that appealed to Hákon more.¹¹¹ But the new modes of thought left traces in *hirð* literature. We shall take as our starting point the representations of love and sexuality in *Konungs skuggsjá*.

Konungs skuggsjá's Advice to Amorous Knights

Konungs skuggsjá's portrayal of heaven's *hirð* sounds some of the same notes as the *riddarasögur*: 'At my [Jesus's] table, one can hear songs of stringed instruments with pleasant and fair tones. There are performances and songs one seldom hears; there is playfulness and happiness and friendliness without deceit, deprived of any sorrow.'¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Ks, p. 2, lines 15–22. See Sverre Bagge, *The Political Thought of The King's Mirror*, Mediaeval Scandinavia Supplements, 3 (Odense: Odense University Press, 1987), pp. 98–97, on this introduction. The author of *Konungs skuggsjá* was clearly a well-educated cleric with extensive knowledge of contemporary theology, history, and the genre of mirrors of princes; see Bagge, *Political Thought*, pp. 218–24.

¹¹¹ Anne Louise Lien, 'Fra krigerflokk til høvisk hoff? Æresbegrepet i norsk hirdmiljø fra ca. 1000 til 1270' (unpublished master's thesis, University of Oslo, 1997), pp. 117–18.

¹¹² Ks, p. 99, lines 33–35: 'At minu borðe ma hœyra þiotannde strængleica með sætum oc fagrum tona þar kvæðskapr oc fahœyrðer songar þar er skemtán oc glæðe oc flærðlaus fagnaðr on alla sorgh.'

This is a Paradise in which a chivalrous knight like Tristram could feel at home. The milieu in which *Konungs skuggsjá* was written also shows many points of similarity with the general sense of courtly behaviour put forward in the *riddarasögur*, for example with regard to humility (*lítillátr*).

The advice to Norwegian *hirð* members on how they should act towards women, however, is rather scanty in *Konungs skuggsjá*. The most important thing is for men to adapt their conversation to women according to whether ‘they are young or old, of great wealth or somewhat less wealthy, so that the words he uses fit their rank, as it is seemly for them to hear and for the man to speak’.¹¹³ We would note the author’s concern for what courtly ladies can bear to hear; it suggests a dawning difference between different social discourses on love and sexuality.¹¹⁴

The author of *Konungs skuggsjá*, therefore, was not seeking to extol courtly love. However, he was eager to condemn sinful sexuality. This comes through particularly in his use of Bible stories. In his retelling of the story of Joseph in Egypt, women’s sexual desire is put in a very negative light, while Joseph’s self-control is idealized. Joseph had come to Egypt as a slave, but quickly became a respected servant in the household of a powerful chieftain. The chieftain’s wife came to love him more than was good for her: ‘she wanted to be unfaithful to her husband by her ill desire because she had such love for Joseph, and she was not ashamed to show him with brave lust what she had in mind’.¹¹⁵ Joseph found her behaviour unbecoming. First of all, he is a slave himself, though from a good family. Secondly, he does not wish to dishonour his lord. Joseph’s further fate shows that humility towards his lord was more rewarding than living according to his lusts or using women’s sexuality as a means of power. A similar moral later underlies the very negative portrayals of Absalom and Adonijah, David’s sons, who lie with their father’s concubines to dishonour him and gain honour for themselves.¹¹⁶ Here, traditional attitudes are indirectly condemned.

The author of *Konungs skuggsjá* was nevertheless aware that men’s desire for women could at times get the upper hand, even in the best of men. He uses the story

¹¹³ Ks, p. 64, lines 12–14: ‘En þat er hovæska at væra bliðr oc letlatr oc þionosto fullr oc fagr yrðr kunna at væra goðr felaghe isamsæti oc iviðrræðu viðr aðra menn, kunna a því goða skilning æf maðr talar við konor hvart sæm ero ungar eða meirr alldri orpnar rikar eð noccot urikari at þau orð kunni hann til þeira at mæla er þeira tignund hæfi oc þeim sami væl at hœyra oc manni sami væl at mæla.’

¹¹⁴ One is reminded of how Andreas Capellanus advised his audience to converse with courtly women, while forcing their will on peasant women; see *De Amore*, book I, ch. 11: *De amore rusticorum* (Andreas Cappelanus, *On Love*, ed. and trans. by P. G. Walsh (London: Duckworth, 1982), pp. 222–23).

¹¹⁵ Ks, p. 68, lines 5–7: ‘hon villdi hora bonnda sinn mæðr illri girnð sakar astar þeikar er hon hafðe við ioseph oc æigi skamðez hon þærs mæðr diarflegri igirnd at syna hanum þat er hænni var iskapi.’

¹¹⁶ Ks, p. 109, lines 24–26, pp. 119–20.

of David's affair with Bathsheba to demonstrate this point. David sent his *hirð*-man Uriah to his death in order to have Uriah's wife Bathsheba for himself. A question that arises in *Konungs skuggsjá* is why Saul, who had refused to obey the Lord and obliterate the enemies of the Israelites in a battle, is punished more severely than David. The reason is that Saul sinned against his lord/Lord, while David's obedience, contrition, and humility afterwards saved him from God's wrath. David's sin was not a symptom of utter wickedness, but a flaw to be found in every man's nature. This flaw meant that no man could be complacent about such sin. The decisive difference is between the men who continue in their sin and those who, like David, soon repent of their actions.¹¹⁷ In his apology for David's conduct, the author's use of courtly-Christian ideals is plain to see. Extramarital love is a source of inner moral conflict for a good Christian, but virtuous men should not be regarded as reprobate on account of their strong natural tendencies.¹¹⁸

The author is much clearer on the women *hirð* members should avoid entirely; visiting houses of prostitution is especially strongly condemned.¹¹⁹ A ban on keeping company with prostitutes is also found in *Hirðskrá*, listed in the same breath as robbery, drunkenness, adultery, and keeping mistresses.¹²⁰ The number of warnings and admonitions against unbridled sexuality and visits to prostitutes from the middle of the thirteenth century apparently reflects a growth in the extent of prostitution in Bergen.¹²¹ Whorehouses were tolerated to a large degree in towns; many considered that such activity channelled men's sexuality in a socially harmless direction.¹²²

¹¹⁷ Ks, pp. 108–09; cf. p. 88, lines 5–11.

¹¹⁸ David's lust as an inner sin rather than an outer action is also found in contemporary sources, for example in the depiction of the Fall of man in *Stjórn*, the Norse translation of the Bible and some of its commentators. The compiler of *Stjórn I* had a tendency of excusing the sinful deeds of the patriarchs and showing understanding for those who sin because of original sin. Of this also follows a slightly milder version of the condemning words against Eve after the Fall; there is a tendency towards equality between the sexes here. On the relation between gender and the Fall of man in *Stjórn* and *Konungs skuggsjá*, see Janet Schrunck Ericksen, 'Transforming Female History in *Stjórn*', *Scandinavian Studies*, 70 (1998), 195–208; see also Reidar Astås, *Et bibelverk fra middelalderen: Studier i Stjórn* (Oslo: Novus, 1987), pp. 603–07. Astås has also pointed out how the working method of the compiler of *Stjórn* is similar to that of the *riddarasögur*. This is of some significance since the prologue in *Stjórn I* tells us that the audience of the work was supposed to be the secular men in the service of the king; see Astås, *Et bibelverk*, pp. 497, 678.

¹¹⁹ Ks, p. 64, line 39, p. 5, line 30, p. 56, line 23. The term used is *port kvænna hus*.

¹²⁰ H ch. 23 (ch. 28 in the old edition, based on a different manuscript). This is also condemned with emphasis in *Parcevals saga*; see Kratz, 'Parcevals saga', pp. 23–24; Barnes, 'Parcevals Saga'.

¹²¹ Inger Holtan, *Ekteskap, frillelevnad og hordom i norsk høgmellomalder* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1996), pp. 143–55.

¹²² Ruth Mazo Karras, 'Prostitution in Medieval Europe', in *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, ed. by Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage (New York: Garland, 1996), pp. 243–60.

Another important consequence of prostitution was that it contributed to a distinction between ‘bad’ and ‘honourable’ women in a new way that served both Church and aristocracy.¹²³ In Bergen prostitutes could be found in the streets, taverns, and bordellos, and so that no one should mistake them for high-class women, they were not allowed to wear expensive clothes or ostentatious jewellery.¹²⁴ *Konungs skuggsjá* contributed to setting Bergen’s prostitution milieu in a sociosexual frame of reference, a framework that contributed to women’s honour being linked more closely to their sexual actions. The conception of good, courtly love was accompanied by its opposite, a negative view of the sexuality in the streets of Bergen. Thus love and sexuality were given a new social significance that established norms for female conduct that were just as strong as male norms.

The author of *Konungs skuggsjá* assumed his audience was familiar with the *riddarasögur* and therefore did not consider it necessary to set out his own love ethic. He was much more concerned with giving advice against sinful sexuality, perhaps in order to show when love was no longer courtly but against God’s will. The *riddarasögur* in this way may have complemented *Konungs skuggsjá* by their examples of knights’ ideal conduct in relation to women. By the middle of the thirteenth century, the Crown and Church had a common interest in the introduction of new ideals of love, even if their aims were different. For the Church, it was important to distinguish good bonds of love from sinful sexuality. For the king, that distinction was important because it disarmed love’s potential for social explosiveness, while certain forms of sexuality, particularly prostitution and adultery, could be forbidden and punished in accordance with the new courtly-Christian ideology.

Pacification of Love among the Norwegian Aristocracy

The absence of chivalric literature produced in Norway has often been interpreted as a sign that the new love ideology found little support in the country, or only on a superficial level. However, there was no dynamic literary milieu that was not in close connection to the king’s *hirð* in Hákon Hákonarson’s time.¹²⁵ After his death, we find many indications of the Norwegian aristocracy’s interest in courtly ideals of love. The writer of a seventeenth-century manuscript of *Blómstrvalla saga* claims in the prologue that a thirteenth-century Norwegian ambassador had heard this saga

¹²³ Birte Carlé, ‘Fra slægtssaga til kvindesaga’, in *Förändringar i kvinnors villkor under medeltiden*, ed. by Silja Aðalsteinsdóttir and Helgi Þorláksson, Ritsafn Sagnfræðistofnunar, 9 (Reykjavík: Sagnfræðistofnum Háskóla Íslands, 1983), pp. 55–70.

¹²⁴ *NGL*, IV (1885), 362.

¹²⁵ See Else Mundal, ‘Byen som litterært sentrum’, in *By og land i middelalderen*, ed. by Ingvild Øye, Onsdagskvelder i Bryggens museum, 9 (Bergen: Bryggens Museum, 1994), pp. 64–85 (pp. 77–82).

recited in German while on a visit to Spain and brought it back home to the Norwegian king. This provenance might have been cited merely as an advertisement for the saga, but it is not entirely improbable that it could have happened that way.¹²⁶ We know that aristocratic men and women in the time of Magnús lagabætir (d. 1280), Eiríkr Magnússon (d. 1299), and Hákon V Magnússon (d. 1319) accumulated great collections of books, even if we do not know the extent and content of all these libraries.¹²⁷ These book owners lived in a time when *hirð* warriors became noblemen and received administrative posts in the king's central and local government. In 1286–87, the baron Bjarni Erlingsson (d. 1313) brought home from a trip to Scotland an English version of a French poem in the romance cycle of Charlemagne and had it translated. In Old Norse it was called *Ólifs þáttur ok Landrés* and grafted into a manuscript of *Karlamagnús saga*.¹²⁸

At the beginning of the fifteenth century, an indignant copyist of *Viktors saga ok Blávus* wrote that people in the time of Hákon V (1299–1319) had made dancing and other 'wanton folly' common amusements, despite the King's own sound morals.¹²⁹ More recent research into the history of literature has shown that the decades around 1300 were a turning point in the literary appropriation of courtly ideals in Norway. The three *Eufemiavisene* ('Eufemia's poems') were translated into Swedish by order of Hákon V's German queen Eufemia in 1301–12. The scholar of ballads Bengt R. Jonsson believes that these poems show influence from the ballad genre and that the milieu of the Norwegian court in the period 1280–1330 prepared much of the foundation for the development and expansion of medieval ballads.¹³⁰ Olav Solberg has

¹²⁶ See Stephen A. Mitchell, *Heroic Sagas and Ballads* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 79.

¹²⁷ Anne Holtmark, *Studier i norrøn diktning* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1956), pp. 1–14; cf. Oscar Albert Johnsen, 'Norske geistliges og kirkelige institutioners bogsamlinger i den senere middelalder', in *Sproglige og historiske afhandlinger viede Sophus Bugges minde* (Kristiania: Aschehoug, 1908), pp. 73–96.

¹²⁸ Jonna Louis-Jensen, 'Om Ólíf og Landrés, vers og prosa samt kvinder og poeter', in *Eyvindarbók: Festskrift til Eyvind Fjeld Halvorsen*, ed. by Finn Hødnebo and others (Oslo: Institutt for nordistikk og litteraturvitenskap, University of Oslo, 1992), pp. 217–30.

¹²⁹ VsB, p. 3: 'ok því weit ek at godr gamler menn vilia likia sig ok sin skemtan epter hans [Hákon V] fogrum hattum enn af leggja hlaatur ok hopp danzs ok dáraskap ok hégomligt herianskit'.

¹³⁰ Bengt R. Jonsson, 'Bråvalla och Lena: Kring balladen SMB 56, I', *Sumlen*, 1989, 49–166 (pp. 64–72); Jonsson, 'Oral Literature, Written Literature, and the Ballad: Relations between Old Norse Genres', in *The Ballad and Oral Literature*, ed. by Joseph Harris, Harvard English Studies, 17 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), pp. 139–70 (pp. 152–55); see also David Colbert, *The Birth of the Ballad: The Scandinavian Medieval Genre*, Skrifter utgivna av Svenskt visarkiv, 10 (Stockholm: Svenskt visarkiv, 1989), pp. 76–87; Colbert, 'The Birthplace of the Ballad', *Sumlen*, 1992–93, 279–84; Olav Solberg, *Norsk folkediktning: Litteraturhistoriske linjer og tematiske perspektiv* (Oslo: Cappelen, 1999), pp. 70–73.

found many common characteristics in literary formulas between diplomatic texts and ballads that indicate an active literary milieu in Norway in the late Middle Ages.¹³¹ Another scholar of ballads, David Colbert, has argued that the aristocracy were the bearers of the new ballad culture in the Middle Ages; it was only after the Reformation that the genre became connected with the common people.¹³² At the same time, ballads were an oral genre that could easily become part of a more general folk culture.

The use of ballads at weddings seems likely; the content of many of them revolves around love, courtship, and marriage. It is outside the scope of this book to analyze the collected corpus of ballads in a manner that reflects responsible source criticism. However, I do wish to point out certain tendencies. The legendary poems seem to have a positive attitude to love and marriage. In the ballad *Olav og Kari*, marital bliss reigns between the two main characters for seven years. Then Olav's mother insinuates that Kari is a witch, and Olav kills his wife in a rage. The ballad is often interpreted as an expression of the strong control parents wanted to exercise over their children's marriages, but we should bear in mind that the ballad makes it clear Olav had defied his mother in his choice of bride. Instead, it shows the young man's relatively free position in relation to his parents. The ballad idealizes the bond of marriage over the couple's bonds to their families. Kari goes straight to heaven and pleads for Olav to be forgiven, and the poem ends with the two being reunited in heaven. Olav's mother, however, cannot be saved from hell. The idea of the eternal and indissoluble bond between spouses is strongly present, which indicates either origins in a clerical milieu or the popular acceptance of the connection between love and marriage.¹³³

There is a tendency in many of the historical and chivalric poems towards romanticized interpretations of historical events. *Visen om Bjarnesønnene* tells the story of the royal official Jon dróttning's relationship with a peasant woman. The story is taken from the beginning of the thirteenth century and is also known from *Bøglunga sögur*. In that account the magnate Jón forces his way into the loft and assaults the wife of the farmer Þrándr. In courtly verse, this story is transformed into a tragic love story with the focus on the woman's sorrow that her beloved Jón is killed.¹³⁴ Álfir

¹³¹ Solberg, *Norsk folkediktning*, pp. 76–92.

¹³² Colbert, *Birth*, pp. 44–52, 151–54.

¹³³ Several versions with commentaries are printed in Ådel Gjostein Blom, *Ballader og legender: Fra norsk middelalderdiktning* (Oslo: Samlaget, 1971), pp. 151–71. Other legendary ballads are especially concerned about women's resistance to men's sexual desire; see chapter 9.

¹³⁴ This ballad is only preserved in Iceland. Knut Liestøl considered the song as so close to the story of *Bøglunga sögur* (Bgls, pp. 47–50; see above, chapter 3) that it probably was composed in the thirteenth century: Knut Liestøl, 'Sogegrunnlaget for ei islensk folkevise', *Maal og Minne*, 1914, 181–99. Vésteinn Ólason has more recently argued that the ballad was not composed earlier than the fourteenth century, quite likely in Iceland, but probably on the basis of an oral story from Norway: Vésteinn Ólason, *The Traditional Ballads of Iceland*:

Erlingsson (d. 1290) was another magnate who later became the subject of poems. According to tradition, he was a good knight and seducer of women with particularly good connections to the widowed Queen Ingeborg. But when he tries to seduce the Danish queen, he is less than successful. She dismisses his overtures and orders his execution.¹³⁵ King Eiríkr Magnússon, for his part, is placed in a tragic love affair with a Swedish woman in the courtly ballad *Kong Erik og Hugaljod*.¹³⁶ In Jón dróttning, Álfr Erlingsson, and Eiríkr Magnússon, the fourteenth-century aristocracy — who were beginning to acquire a noble identity for themselves — found historical characters in the recent past to idealize and identify themselves with.

In fourteenth-century Norway, poetry was also composed about Hagbard and Signe, a pair who were already known in the early medieval period. The Norwegian version is now lost, but along with *Tristrams saga*, it influenced the extant ballad *Bendik og Árolilja*.¹³⁷ The difference between it and *Tristrams saga* is that the two lovers are unmarried and nothing other than the father's (unfounded) opposition to the noble knight Bendik stands in the way of a good marriage. This simplifies the story considerably in comparison to the Tristan legend. The young man's love proves stronger than the bolts on the father's doors, and Bendik breaks into Árolilja's bower. The affair is discovered and Bendik condemned to death. Every human and animal, and even the angels, pray for his soul. The two finally meet in death due to their love, but from their graves the lily grows up and entwines them together. Earlier versions of the story of Bendik and Árolilja may have contained the concept of seduction as a power of chaos; in the sagas dating from around 1200, the father's reaction would have been completely understandable.¹³⁸ In the ballad, the father's actions are clearly viewed negatively because he prevents true lovers from being united in marriage. This is a clear sign that a Christian-courtly discourse regarding love, courtship, and marriage had won a greater place in the secular frame of reference towards the end of the High Middle Ages.

These examples indicate an active acceptance of the message of the *riddarasögur* among the aristocracy in the late Middle Ages. One of the very few examples of Norwegian poetry outside the ballad genre in the late Middle Ages shows the same

Historical Studies, Rit, 22 (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, 1982), pp. 204–10. The existence of a Norwegian ballad may have been strengthened by Jonsson's theory on the Scandinavian ballads.

¹³⁵ Kåre Lunden, *Norge under Sverreætten, 1177–1319*, Norges historie, 3 (Oslo: Cappelen, 1976), pp. 437–39.

¹³⁶ Cf. Solberg, *Norsk folkediktning*, 203–06.

¹³⁷ NoBa, pp. 194–203; cf. Paul Schach, 'Some Observations on the Influence of *Tristrams saga ok Isöndar* in Old Icelandic Literature', in *Old Norse Literature and Mythology: A Symposium*, ed. by Edgar C. Polomé (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969), pp. 81–129; Solberg, *Norsk folkediktning*, pp. 62–64.

¹³⁸ Bagge, *Mennesket*, pp. 206–07; Solberg, *Norsk folkediktning*, pp. 174–76.

indication. There are two love poems scribbled in the margins of a manuscript of *Óláfs saga helga* dating to the late fourteenth century.¹³⁹ The first poem asserts that love for a woman does not rule out love for God; instead, the poet turns to God to pray for help:

ek vill nu firir guði klagja
 at ek skal brot fra míni kero fly
 ek syrgir þat beðe netr oc ðaga
 þat virði þan hera firir ofan er sky
 hon hífir mik íattat sína tru
 ec kerer þat firir guði oc vare fru
 ma ec eí koma til henar nu
 bryst hafr hon sem fálken hvíte
 vaxen ret sem kiosa vill
 fist eí venare í þeta ríkí
 so seigir mín hugr oc hiartat til
 hon hafr gefet mer eít leynilegtt sar
 ek kenðist eigi meðr þat fyr en i ar
 ek venter skiot till ðøþans ga
 vilði hon mína sorg firir enða
 so þeim elði fra mínu hiataono venða
 síolf er hon meistare uttan enða

I complain before God that I have to flee from my beloved. I mourn over this both night and day; if only He understood, the Lord who is beyond the sky. She has pledged me her fidelity, I complain before God and our Lady that I cannot come to her now. Her breasts are like the white falcon, she is of straight stature as one could wish. There is no fairer in this land; that my mind and my heart tell me. She has given me a hidden wound; I did not feel it until this year; now I expect a rapid death. Will she end my sorrows, so the fire from my heart will turn? She herself is eternally mistress of it.

In this poem, love-longing is not expressed through historical and legendary characters, but is presented as intimate and personal. The invocations of God and Mary are striking, and show that the poet's milieu considered love to have a holy sanction. Whether because of her family or for some other unknown reason, he must travel away from her, but the whole time it is she who can make the man happy; a possible conflict of honour with the woman's family is completely out of the picture. The woman has also promised the poet her fidelity, a circumstance that may point to a promise to marry, without the parents' interference.

In the other poem written in the margins of the manuscript, the poet derives enjoyment from a man's unhappiness in love:

ek hæyrða talat af æin man
 nu firir skama stunða

¹³⁹ Holtsmark, *Studier*, p. 7; Jón Helgason, 'Det norske kjærlighetsdikt i DG: 8', in *Opuscula I*, ed. by Jón Helgason, Bibliotheca Arnarnagana, 20 (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1960), pp. 78–80.

mer þikir þat skemtan at flytia fram
 ek þat kosa munða
 han bað umm mey en hon vil æi
 iat af hiartans grunða

I heard about a man a short while ago. I thought it amusing to pass it on; I choose to do it. He asked for a maiden, but she would not say yes for reasons of the heart.¹⁴⁰

This verse reveals, in a more playful way, a mode of thought in which it was natural for a woman to have the right to follow her heart. The conflict between suitor and *giptingarmaðr* is toned down to insignificance. The formulation ‘han bað umm mey en hon vil æi’ makes it clear that the verse describes a courtship where the woman’s own consent was decisive. To what degree did the new ideals influence the aristocracy’s conception of women’s power of choice? We will try to get a step closer to an answer by looking at portrayals of marriage among characters of kingly rank in *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*.

Women’s Consent among Royalty and Aristocracy: Choice or Coercion?

In *Hákonar saga*, Sturla Þórðarson puts great emphasis on the royal family’s wedding feasts. King Hákon’s wedding in 1225 lasted five days with a feast of unprecedented grandeur. Barons and the most important farmers of the entire Guláping were invited together with a good many learned men. The saga says that a number of monastics were also present, led by five abbots. It is not improbable that Brother Robert, the translator of *Tristrams saga*, might have been among these.¹⁴¹ On the whole, the saga paints a picture of a wedding that surpasses anything found in earlier kings’ sagas. For Oddr munk, Snorri, and others, the most important thing was whom the King married, not how he did it. The signal Hákon’s splendid wedding gave his guests — and the readers of the saga — was that the commencement of a marriage was an extremely important event in a man’s and woman’s life.

Interestingly enough, *Hákonar saga* also devotes a great deal of space to the bride’s opinion prior to marriage. In the previous chapter we saw that Margrét Skúladóttir’s consent was emphasized. The conception of her consent before the marriage was contracted was in step with the canonical requirements of the time, but we also detected a more heroic conception of the significance of a woman’s acknowledgement of her husband. It is also telling that *Hákonar saga* dwells on the emotional relationship between the King and Queen. Margrét is portrayed as a good and loyal wife to her husband, despite his conflict with her father. Her loyalty to Hákon does not conflict with the fact that she remained a part of her parents’ family, in accordance

¹⁴⁰ Ludvig Holm-Olsen, ‘Middelalderens litteratur i Norge’, in *Fra Runene til Norske Selskab*, Norsk litteraturhistorie, 1 (Oslo: Cappelen, 1974), pp. 19–342 (p. 338).

¹⁴¹ Leach, *Angevin Britain*, pp. 179–83.

with the bilateral Norse kinship system. However, consent created a practical framework in which a woman could not repudiate her husband as easily as before. The legally binding force of consent shifted the woman's future perspective and sense of belonging in the direction of her marriage rather than her previous kinship group.

For his part, Hákon was obligated to show fidelity to his wife. According to *Konungs skuggsjá*, the king should always remember to pray for his queen, not just because she is one of the leaders of the country, but also because she is 'the one that you [God] have given me in marital union'.¹⁴² Hákon did have (at least) two illegitimate children, Cecilía and Sigurðr, with an otherwise unknown woman named Kanga, besides his three children with Margrét: Kristín, Hákon ungi, and Magnús. The marriages of these children have long been seen as an important part of Hákon's strategic foreign policy.¹⁴³ What role do feelings and choice play in such a situation?

At Cecilía Hákonardóttir's betrothal to King Haraldr Óláfsson of Man and Suðreyjar in 1248, Sturla expresses himself in a traditional way: '[Then] King Haraldr proposed to Lady Cecilía, the king's daughter [. . .]. The king received this well, and since it was fated, King Haraldr was betrothed to Princess Cecilía.'¹⁴⁴ Sturla calls attention to the fact that Haraldr was greatly honoured by this match. The betrothal of Hákon ungi and Earl Birgir's daughter Ríkiza was part of a pact of friendship in 1249. Nothing is said of what Hákon ungi and Ríkiza thought of the matter themselves, but Hákon and Earl Birgir 'parted with great love' when the agreement was concluded.¹⁴⁵ The emotional bond between *giptingarmenn* is the most important in this betrothal.

In these marriages, there is little to indicate an attitude that the woman's consent had come to be considered important. In other places, however, Sturla shows great interest in what women think of their husbands-to-be. An example is Kristín Hákonardóttir's journey to Spain, which is described in uncommon detail. Kristín was clearly the pride of the Norwegian court. To be sure, little is said of Kristín in the saga, but the fact that Prince Alexander Nevskiy of Novgorod asked for her for his son in 1251 and that King Alfonso X of Castile courted her seven years later on behalf of his brothers must have been feathers in the cap of the Norwegian royal house.

Alfonso's offer of marriage was debated at the highest national level. The archbishop and Norway's wisest men eventually agreed that the match was suitable for

¹⁴² Ks, p. 96, lines 6–7: 'Drotning minni þeirri er þu hæfir mer gefna mæð hiuskapir sam-bannde.'

¹⁴³ Cf. Bagge, *From Gang Leader*, pp. 121–25; Hans Jacob Orning, 'Fra egging til degging? Kvinner i saga og samfunn i norsk høymiddelalder', *Middelalderforum*, 2 (1997), 36–48 (pp. 44–47).

¹⁴⁴ HH ch. 259, p. 255: 'Þá er Hákon konungr sat í Víkinni, flutti Haraldr konungr bónorð sítt, ok bað frú Cecilíu konungs dóttur, er átt hafði herra Gregorius. Konungr tók þessu [vel]. Ok með því at þess var auðit, þá festi hann sér Cecilíu konungs dóttur.'

¹⁴⁵ HH ch. 268, p. 264: 'skilduzt [þeir] með inum mesta kærleik'.

Kristín. In this phase nothing is mentioned of what Kristín thought of being sent to Spain. What she really did think of what was happening is an impossible question to answer, but as the journey is portrayed in *Hákonar saga*, it has the air of a courtly legend with Kristín as the heroine. Wherever she goes she is received with joy; no foreigner had ever been so honourably received, writes Sturla Þórðarson. Moreover, she had the assurance that she would get to choose which of Alfonso's brothers she wanted to marry. That, according to Sturla, was the condition under which King Hákon allowed his daughter to be taken down south.

What sort of man did Kristín settle on? Once in Spain, she first rejected the King of Aragon, Jaime I (1208–76). He was powerful, but too old for her. Friðrekr was a bold hunter and good knight, but had a harelip. Henrik was the best knight of all the brothers, but had recently led a revolt against his father and brothers. Sancius had just been named Archbishop of Toledo and was well suited to being a cleric; no more is said about him. That left Philippus. He was a candidate for the archbishopric of Seville, but King Alfonso said that Philippus

rather wanted to amuse himself at hunting with hawks and dogs, and he [Alfonso] said that Philippus was a great fighter against bears and boars, always happy, cheerful, humble, and the best companion. "He is also the strongest of all us brothers, and a good knight." On his stature and beautiful appearance he said nothing, because the Norwegians could see that for themselves.¹⁴⁶

It is clear that Sturla considered him the perfect husband for Kristín, and he was also the one she liked the best. Philippus betrothed himself to her on Ash Wednesday, 'with the mercy of God and the consent of the King of Castile, and according to her own will'.¹⁴⁷ The portrayal of Kristín's choice and consent must have been Sturla's way of building a bridge between heroic and clerical norms of manliness and marriage.

¹⁴⁶ HH ch. 294, p. 302: 'En Philipus erkibiskups-efni af Sibiliu sagði hann [eigi] vera skapaðan til klerks, heldr at fara með skemtan, haukum ok hundum, ok [kvað] hann vera hinn mesta einvígis-mann at björnum ok villi-svínun; ok jafnliga glaðr ok kátr ok lítillátr, ok inn bezti félagi; "Hann er ok sterkastr af öllum vórum bræðrum, ok goðr riddari." En af vexti hans sagði hann ekki eðr friðleik, þvíat Norðmenn máttu þat jafnliga sjá.'

¹⁴⁷ HH ch. 294, p. 302: 'Þat var Ösku-Óðinsdag er herra Filipus festi jungfrú með Guðs miskunn ok ráði konungsins af Kastell, ok sjálfrar henna vilja'. Kristín died in Seville in 1262. Her sarcophagus was moved to Covarrubias. On the political context for the marriage between Kristín and Infante Felipe, see Bruce Gelsinger, 'A Thirteenth-Century Norwegian-Castilian Alliance', *Medievalia et Humanistica*, n.s., 10 (1981), 55–80; Joseph F. O'Callaghan, *The Learned King: The Reign of Alfonso X* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), pp. 202–03. These studies argue that Hákon wanted support from Emperor Alfonso X to get control over Lübeck, while Alfonso X may have hoped to get support for his proposed crusade in North Africa. Einar Jenssen, *Prinsesse Kristina: myte og virkelighet*, Gamle Tønsberg, 7 (Tønsberg: Stiftelsen Gamle Tønsberg, 1980) points out that Felipe and Bishop Pétr of Hamar, who accompanied Kristín to Castille, had probably both studied under Albertus Magnus in the late 1240s, and thus probably knew of each other already at this time.

The significance of women's consent is also shown several years later when Magnús Hákonarson marries Ingeborg, daughter of the Danish king Erik Plovpenning (1241–50). Erik had only daughters, and they inherited vast estates after his death. King Hákon openly supported a marriage between Magnús and Ingeborg because it offered an opportunity for speculation in the future inheritance after King Erik.¹⁴⁸ In the political game surrounding this inheritance, the seventeen-year-old Ingeborg played a quite important role, if we are to believe Sturla Þórðarson. In the first instance, King Hákon proposed a formal courtship to Ingeborg's guardians in Denmark, but received no answer. Father Askatin and Brother Nikólás were sent away from the dowager queen Margrét before they had obtained a clear answer from her. They were told that when a worthy escort came, Ingeborg could go with them to Norway. But when Bishop Hákon of Oslo came with a large and well-equipped company at the appointed time to fetch the maiden, they found no one to receive them. At first they were bewildered; they knew they had to come to an agreement about Ingeborg's marriage quickly because the Swedish earl Birgir Magnússon had also shown interest in the Danish princess. Bishop Hákon led his company to the convent where Ingeborg was staying and urged her strongly to 'put her case in the hands of God and the King of Norway, and take her own decision, together with what God would teach them to do'.¹⁴⁹ Ingeborg let herself be convinced and Bishop Hákon betrothed her to Magnús. Hákon was also very pleased when he heard that the Bishop had brought Ingeborg to Norway 'according to her own will'.¹⁵⁰ On 11 September 1261, Magnús and Ingeborg were married in what was perhaps the most splendid wedding ever held in Norway.

The royal weddings formally fulfilled the canonical requirement for the bride's consent. What is missing in these narratives is romantic love. Both in Kristín's case and in Ingeborg's, the parameters for expressing their will were considerably restricted, and there is no tendency of any significance towards individualism. The courtly aspect of these marriages is instead contained in their splendour and magnificence.

Towards the end of the thirteenth century, child marriages became more common in the Norwegian royal house. Margrét Eiríksdóttir ('the Maid of Norway') was only six years old when she became significant in the power play that erupted after the Scottish king Alexander III's death in 1286. In 1289, Margrét's father, King Eiríkr Magnússon, arranged a marriage between Margrét and the heir to the English throne. She died in the crossing to Scotland in 1290. A few years later, in 1302, the eight-

¹⁴⁸ Birgit Sawyer and Peter Sawyer, *Medieval Scandinavia: From Conversion to Reformation, circa 800–1500*, The Nordic Series, 17 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), pp. 186–87.

¹⁴⁹ HH ch. 306, p. 313: 'Þeir báðu hana, ok tölðu fyrir henni, at hon skyuldi skjóta sínu máli á Guðs vald ok Noregs-konungs, ok taka sjálfrar sinnar ráð, ok þat sem Guð kendi þeim til at leggja með henni.'

¹⁵⁰ HH ch. 308, p. 315: 'ok hafði með sjálfrar sinnar vilja sunnan farit'.

year-old Ingibjörg Hákonardóttir was betrothed to the Swedish duke Erik Magnusson. They were married in 1312.

These child marriages also contained an element of consent. After all, consent was necessary for the marriage to be valid. King's daughters were always more limited in their choice than other girls, and more was at stake both politically and economically. At the same time, kings, earls, and knights were committed to the myth of courtly love to a certain degree. Indications of this are evident in the Swedish *Erikskrönikan* from around 1330, which tells of Duke Erik Magnusson's betrothal and later marriage to Ingibjörg Hákonardóttir. Despite the great difference in age, the chronicle attempts to create a courtly setting around the meeting of the couple.¹⁵¹ The wedding is described in lavish and courtly style and filled with dancing, games, and fair speeches.¹⁵² Happiness, the chronicle notes, is when a man finds a wife who will want him till they part in death.¹⁵³

How did aristocrats justify such child marriages? The absence of individualistic aspects in such weddings made it easier to look at the woman's consent at the wedding as a form of *heroic* consent. The objective norms for what made a good knight had become a new norm by which to judge men, a norm that aristocratic parents also bought into. This view of love could function as an excuse for marrying off underage daughters to 'the best knight'. By using such objective criteria, parents could ensure a marriage for their daughters based on the concept of *jafnræði* or equality and 'love'. Churchmen could approve this practice as long as the girl did not explicitly deny her consent at the critical moment.¹⁵⁴

Consent in Law and Practice, 1270–1350

Such a compromise between the aristocracy and the jurists of the Church also characterized legislation on the contracting of marriages, even if secular and ecclesiastical legal codes seemed at first glance to contain conflicting rules on who had the right to decide on a marriage. Magnús lagabætir's *Landslög* from 1274 does not contain a separate section on Christian law and thus no canonical regulations on marriage. This is because Archbishop Jón rauði took a strong stand that the Church

¹⁵¹ EK, lines 1830–38.

¹⁵² EK, lines 3447–49; cf. 448–53.

¹⁵³ EK, lines 2551–57.

¹⁵⁴ The Church seems to have given many dispensations to aristocracy, especially concerning marriages to relatives. One example is the papal approval of the marriage between Prince Edward and Margrét Eiríksdóttir, despite being related in the third degree: DN, XIX, 336 (16 Nov. 1289); cf. RN, II, 522, 544, 566. See also DN, VII, 134 (18 Dec. 1330). Such dispensations were probably quite usual in Norway throughout the Middle Ages; see Even Hovdhaugen, *Ekteskap og kjønnsморal i norsk historie*, Norsk kulturarv, 13 (Oslo: Samlaget, 1976), p. 22. This marital policy differs strikingly from that of Bishop Þorlákr at the end of the twelfth century.

alone had the right to develop Christian laws. Jón produced a body of such laws in 1273, but it was never formally acknowledged by the King's representatives. For them, it was the 'old Christian law' that had power. But the Crown and Church were constantly negotiating on questions relating to jurisdiction, both before and after the Tønsberg settlement ('Sættargjerden') of 1277.

Provisions relating to marriage in *Landsløg* are therefore to be found in the section on inheritance; the most important point was to determine which children had the right to inherit. This section opens by establishing that 'Father and mother, if living, shall decide their daughters' marriages'.¹⁵⁵ This is followed by many provisions on the transfer of property, what a woman's dowry should consist of, and how property should be divided on the death of a spouse. What is interesting is that *Landsløg* emphasizes that a marriage must be contracted after 'God's law' in order to be valid. *Landsløg* cannot circumvent the fact that a marriage contracted without or against the parents' knowledge or will is just as valid as any other. But *Landsløg* discourages women from marrying without the counsel of their *giptingarmaðr* by denying such women the right to inherit.¹⁵⁶ Only if the *giptingarmaðr* refuses her an equal (*jafnræði*) match can a woman escape the penalty for having arranged her own marriage. On the other hand, other family members must then agree and swear that the match is equal.¹⁵⁷

But the conflict between the Church and the aristocracy cannot have been particularly great. If we look at the Christian laws written by Archbishop Jón rauði, the bane of the Crown in the 1270s, the picture is not very different when it comes to betrothal and marriage.¹⁵⁸ The difference is that Jón was more specific regarding how a man should court a woman, much more so than Archbishop Eysteinn had been a century before. The principle, however, is much the same: no woman should be forced to marry against her will. Nevertheless, there are traditional elements in his detailed description of an ideal match. For Jón, the courtship began with the man's carefully thought-out choice of a wife. The *giptingarmaðr* should approve the courtship before the suitor was sure the woman would accept his suit. The coming nuptials should then be announced, so that objections (such as too close a kinship) could be brought out before the wedding. Then the suitor could take the woman as his wife. Ecclesiastical jurists thus accepted — and encouraged — traditional steps to matrimony, as long as the woman did not explicitly object. Moreover, by requiring

¹⁵⁵ ML V 1: 'Faðer oc móðer skolu raða giptingum dætra sinna ef þau eru til.'

¹⁵⁶ ML V 2.

¹⁵⁷ A similar emphasis on parental control over marriage is found some years earlier in the Danish law for Jutland, from 1241. These paragraphs have been taken to reflect the interests of the aristocracy, polemicizing against canon law; see Thyra Nors, 'Kampen om ægteskabet: En konfliktfyldt historie om kirkens forsøg på at genne lægfolk ind i den hellige ægtestand', *Den jyske Historiker*, 42 (1987), 28–46 (pp. 35–36); Bagge, *Mennesket*, p. 125.

¹⁵⁸ Kristinn réttir Jóns erkibiskups, in *NGL*, II (1848), chs 40–41.

banns to be read before the betrothal and by maintaining the *gíptingarmaðr*'s strong position, the Church contributed to marriage being surrounded by controls.

Such an attitude indicates that secular and ecclesiastical law were not widely divergent on the question of consent; the woman's 'I do' was just one link in a longer process. However, consent provided a better tool for people to know when a marriage went from being a formal agreement to being fully valid. Secular law and ecclesiastical law did not contradict one another, but rather complemented one another.¹⁵⁹ Ecclesiastical and state power contributed together to the development of new norms for matrimony, but each was responsible for its own area: to defy the *gíptingarmaðr*'s will was a violation of secular law, while marrying a woman off against her will made the marriage invalid according to canon law. The new legislation thus meant that double consent was required: that of the *gíptingarmaðr* and of the woman. In this way, both the spiritual and the economic aspects of the marriage were considered. Did this combination of old and new contribute to making the idea of consent acceptable for the average person? Did the representatives of Church and Crown show interest in following up matrimonial issues in practice?

Norwegian diplomatic material from the period 1300–50 has recently been researched from a similar perspective. The conclusion was that the Church's new teaching on marriage had not caught on to a significant degree.¹⁶⁰ However, I would argue that the compromise regarding consent in secular and ecclesiastical legislation was meaningful for Norwegians, and that the woman's consent came to be regarded as a necessary and obvious part of marriage in the course of the first half of the fourteenth century. Most matrimonial cases we know of from this period turn on whether or not the betrothal was legally valid. The Bishops of Bergen, Árni Sigurðarson (1305–14) and his brother Auðfinnr (1314–30), were particularly engaged in such cases. The two brothers were well-schooled jurists educated at Orléans, and trained administrators. The years they served at Bergen Cathedral were characterized by great independence with regard to canon law issues, and both bishops proved to be masterful princes of the Church.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ See Agnes S. Arnórsdóttir, 'Two Models of Marriage? Canon Law and Icelandic Marriage Practice in the Late Middle Ages', in *Nordic Perspectives on Medieval Canon Law*, ed. by Mia Korpiola, Publications of the Matthias Calonius Society, 2 (Saarijärvi: Matthias Calonius Society, 1999), pp. 79–92. In some areas the support of the king and aristocracy on Church law seems clear, especially concerning more stable marriages. For example, divorce was only allowed in case of a violation of canonical validation of a marriage; see Vegard Skånland, 'Skilsmisse, Alm. o. Norge', *KLNM*, xvi (1971), cols 505–08. Helmholz has argued in the case of medieval England that secular and clerical institutions had to cooperate to get marriage disputes to court at all: Richard H. Helmholz, *Marriage Litigation in Medieval England* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974), p. 5, cf. p. 31.

¹⁶⁰ Holtan, *Ekteskap*.

¹⁶¹ Helle, *Kongssete*, pp. 601–03; see also Oluf Kolsrud, *Noregs kyrkjesoga*, vol. 1: *Millemalderen* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1958), pp. 258–59.

The first matrimonial case we know that these brothers handled was a dispute from Holmedal in Sogn. A certain Þórir had been betrothed to Þóra but did not want to marry her. Apparently the financial agreement had been concluded and Þóra's consent obtained. Þóra's brother lodged a complaint with the local priest, Arnsteinn, who sent the case to Bishop Árni. Þórir claimed to have had a relationship with Steinvör, a relative of Þóra's, which meant that incest regulations would prevent the marriage. The Bishop gave a stringent reply to Arnsteinn that Þóra and Þórir should not be married if witnesses confirmed that the affair had taken place before the betrothal. If the claim of an affair was not true, or if the relationship between Þórir and Steinvör had gone on after the betrothal, Þórir should be forced to marry Þóra. In that case, the affair would be considered adultery and not invalid betrothal. The Bishop ordered Arnsteinn to send him a written report of the outcome, and — he insisted — the course of action taken.¹⁶² Only a few weeks later, the Bishop received the reply that many in the village could confirm the affair between Þórir and Þóra's relative. In his reply, Bishop Árni ordered the implicated parties and witnesses to be heard one by one under oath to ensure that they spoke the truth before a final decision was made in the case.¹⁶³ Unfortunately records of the outcome have not survived, but Þórir probably got out of the engagement.

Records survive from many of Bishop Árni's matrimonial cases, but most of them were decided more quickly. That Arnsteinn had to keep sending written reports to the Bishop shows a desire by the bishopric to create a systematic and routine procedure in such cases. Just a few weeks later, on 3 March 1306, a new matrimonial case arose in Bishop Árni's diocese. The parents of a betrothed woman had changed their minds and did not want their daughter to marry the man to whom she was betrothed. They claimed that the man had had an affair with a relative of the woman, an allegation he denied. Bishop Árni made it clear in this case that the marriage should go ahead if the rumours were not confirmed by many additional oaths.¹⁶⁴ Here the Holmedal case acted as a precedent. Two similar-sounding letters from the Bishop issued during a visitation to Naustdal give the impression that Árni soon established a more routine method of handling cases relating to marriage.¹⁶⁵

In 1309, Árni was involved in a matrimonial case in Ullensvang. Ása had had relationships with two men. She had lived for some time with Þorkell, and they had entered into a betrothal (*verba de praesenti*). In the Church's eyes, this was a fully valid marriage. But prior to this, a man named Eyjólfur had been betrothed to Ása. Bishop Árni annulled the marriage between Ása and Þorkell and declared that Eyjólfur should marry Ása and live with her in marital love.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶² DN, VII, 30 (13 Nov. 1305).

¹⁶³ DN, IV, 62 (1 Feb. 1306).

¹⁶⁴ DN, VIII, 17 (3 Mar. 1306).

¹⁶⁵ DN, X, 7, 8 (both 14 May 1308).

¹⁶⁶ DN, III, 83: 'ut dictam mulierem ad se recipiens de cetero maritali affectione pertractet'.

Bishop Auðfinnr was, like his brother, interested in following up questions regarding the validity of marriages. For him, it was crystal clear that consent created an indissoluble bond of marriage.¹⁶⁷ On 16 March 1325, he pronounced judgement in a case one Domhildr had brought against Eiríkr. Some time previously, Eiríkr and Domhildr had met in a tavern in Bergen, and Eiríkr had wanted to sleep with her. She was only willing to comply if he betrothed himself to her first. She clearly knew quite well that such a betrothal followed by sexual intercourse constituted a valid marriage. Eiríkr and Domhildr shared a bed for four nights, but then he became tired of her. He moved out, thinking that no one could prove that they had been betrothed. Domhildr, however, had a daughter who had listened at the door in the tavern, as she testified afterward to Auðfinnr's emissary. Another woman, apparently a friend of Domhildr's, also testified that she had seen the daughter thrown out of Eiríkr's room and listening at the door thereafter. For Bishop Auðfinnr the case was clear-cut: a duly witnessed betrothal followed by sexual intercourse made the two legally husband and wife.¹⁶⁸

The case between Domhildr and Eiríkr shows a woman using the Church's doctrine of consent to bind a husband to her. We also find other women who step forward as active and conscious agents in betrothal and marriage. A rune-stick from the end of the thirteenth century bears the following inscription: 'Hávarðr sends his greetings and friendship to Guðný. And it is now my full wish to ask for your hand, if you do not rather wish to be with Kolbeinn. Regard your stand in marital issues, and let me hear your wish.'¹⁶⁹ Hávarðr clearly thought it important to have Guðný's will on his side before he approached her *giptingarmaðr* to propose a formal courtship. If there were several men after her, she could upset both her *giptingarmaðr*'s and Hávarðr's marriage plans for her. Thus, the woman's own plans for the future and her will had become a separate aspect of matrimony. It did not prevent formal courtships being proposed to her parents. Around 1300, Úlfr Hávarðarson had a friend send a letter to the priest Fjallar. The letter told Fjallar that Úlfr wanted to

¹⁶⁷ See also DN, IV, 166a–b (23 Feb. 1325) and DN, IV, 175 (12 Feb. 1328) between Ívarr Sölvasson and Magnhildr. This last mentioned case is interesting because it indicates a judicial practice that seems to have continued after the Reformation. Ívarr had tried to defect from his promise of marriage to Magnhildr. After investigating the matter, Auðfinnr concluded that the two of them had given mutual promises and afterward had engaged in intercourse. This made them a married couple according to canon law, and Ívarr had to take Magnhildr as his wife.

¹⁶⁸ DN, v, 72.

¹⁶⁹ A74: -|au arþær : sender :gu|----| : g|[-]þærs: kueþiu ok sinauigan | ok nu er min fuler uili:at:biþia þin:ef þu uilt:æihi meþ | [---]bæini: uer[-]: [---]a: þit rap: ok lat sehia mer | þinuilia (*Hávarðr sendir Guðnýju Guðs kveðju ok sína vingan. Ok nú er minn fullr vili at biðja þín, ef þú vilt eigi með Kolbeini vera. Huga þitt ráð, ok lát segja mér þinn vilja*). Text from Terje Spurkland, *I begynnelsen var fuþark: Norske runer og runeinnskrifter* (Oslo: Cappelen, 2001), p. 210. This rune-stick was found beneath the floor of Lom stave church in 1973.

‘seek that honourable match and wife that Úlfhildr, your daughter, is’.¹⁷⁰ A tally of all his property and money follows. In this latter example, the suitor followed the recommendations of *Landslög* for a correct approach, but in the former instance the order was reversed with the woman’s consent being sought first. Thus it is at the end of the High Middle Ages that both approaches to courtship were possible.

Suitors could choose whether they sought the father’s or the daughter’s consent first, but when matters got as far as a betrothal, all parties had to agree. We have a good account of a betrothal agreement from 20 February 1340. In this case it appears that the woman, Sigríðr Bárðardóttir, regretted the betrothal afterward. Usually a couple were married within a year after the betrothal, but for unknown reasons this was not the case here. For this reason, a statement was taken on 22 October 1341 from a witness who described what actually happened when the betrothal was agreed. After an agreement regarding the dowry, dower (groom’s gift to his bride), and ‘other conditions of sale’ had been reached,

stod þá Þorstein upp ok gæk ifir um þvert golfett ok tok i hond Sigríðar en Ogmundr langr skildi firir mæðr þeima orðom, gud se hansal þeira Þosteins Ivarssonar ok Sigríðar Barðardotor. Pat skilzt ok flæltz undir þeira hansale at Þorstein festir ser Sigríði till æghinar kono aat guds loghum ok heilagher kirkju se þar guð ifir vattr ok þeir aller goðer men nemdir vattar, sem orð min høyra. Gaf þá Þorstein Sigríði opnem-dri fingr gull ok kysti hana. Var ok aat allre vare æslan sion vitend ok undirstadnigh jam goðr vili Sigríðar till þessa kaups sem Þosteins. Varo her i hia moder hennar ok systir ok margher aðrer kvastwegghia þeira frendr ok winir, ok iam glaða saam wer hana utt gangha af þessare festar stefno sem hon in kom.¹⁷¹

Þorsteinn rose and walked across the floor and took Sigríðr’s hand in his. And Ogmundr langr said these words before the men: ‘May God see this handclasp [confirmation of a legal agreement] of Þorsteinn Ívarsson and Sigríðr Bárðardóttir. That is confirmed and made true by their agreement that Þorsteinn takes in troth Sigríðr as his lawfully wedded wife after the laws of God and the Holy Church. God be witness to that, and all good men who are called as witnesses, who hear my words.’ Then Þorsteinn gave Sigríðr the aforementioned gold finger-ring and kissed her. After all our opinion, sight, knowledge, and understanding, Sigríðr’s will to this contract was as good as Þorsteinn’s. Present were also her mother, sister, and many other friends and relatives of both of them. And we saw her walk as happy from the betrothal-ceremony as she came into it.

This document shows how ideally a betrothal should have gone in the first half of the fourteenth century, as told by those who wanted to portray the betrothal as the beginning of an indissoluble union between Þorsteinn and Sigríðr. We no longer know the reason why this statement was necessary; perhaps Sigríðr had discovered faults in Þorsteinn she could not overlook, or perhaps she had found someone else. It

¹⁷⁰ DN, II, 60: ‘vill læita ser þar sœmndar rads ok kvanfangs sem Ulfíldr ær dotter yðvr’.

¹⁷¹ DN, I, 276.

is possible that she would have argued that she had never explicitly said 'yes' during the ceremony. But it was too late; if the woman did not refuse, she was considered to have consented. The emphasis on how the witnesses interpreted Sigríðr's unchanged good humour suggests this may have been the crucial issue in the case.

One woman who dared to use the loophole to marry the man she wanted was Margrét, daughter of the knight Pétr of Ædey. She married Tidemaðr of Lübeck in the 1320s without her family's consent. The validity of the marriage was not questioned, but the consequences for Margrét were. Since secular law had been violated, it was the law-speaker who presided in this case. In accordance with King Magnús's *Landslög* (Book V, section 2), Margrét was denied her inheritance. On 2 August 1329, there was a reconciliation between her and her sister Ása; Margrét got her mother's half of the inheritance back and a good deal of her father's as well.¹⁷² The case shows that it was quite possible, though far from easy, to contract a marriage according to one's own head and heart. The fallout could vary according to the social standing and personalities of the persons involved.

Neither representatives of the Crown nor ecclesiastical jurists wanted women to throw off all social restraint; both groups believed that the role of marriage in society was too important for that. *Landslög* thus threatens heavy fines or corporal punishment for women who lure 'people's children or female relatives to this [consensual marriage without the advice of other relatives] or other sinful behaviour'.¹⁷³ The provision thus assumes that it was primarily women who lured others to such marriages. If we interpret this interpolation as a reaction by lawmakers to women's actual deeds, it indicates that women really saw an opportunity to get around patriarchal marital norms through the doctrine of consent.¹⁷⁴ That new ideas for women regarding sexuality and humility were gaining ground in the late Middle Ages did not keep women from exploiting other ideas to their own ends.

Diplomatic material from the first half of the fourteenth century shows that the Bishops of Bergen displayed great determination in putting the doctrine of consent into practice. The woman's consent was essential for a valid marriage, but it does not appear that the Church was very concerned about the bride's age at the time of the betrothal or whether she ever had second thoughts. Matrimonial cases also show that in practice, the Church had jurisdiction over cases in which canon law was in question. Most people were familiar with the significance of consent for a marriage

¹⁷² DN, II, 172.

¹⁷³ ML V 2: 'En konor þær er liazt til þess at locka til slíks eða annars saurlífis born manna eða frendkonor.'

¹⁷⁴ Marital cases from Denmark also indicate that women used the possibility to marry without the knowledge or consent of their relatives from the beginning of the thirteenth century. These cases caused trouble for Churchmen; see Helge Paludan, *Familia og familie: To europæiske kulturelementers møde i højmiddelalderens Danmark* (Århus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag, 1995), pp. 153–58.

to be valid. Women and men began to bring their matrimonial cases before the priest or bishop, often to exploit the system.¹⁷⁵ Acceptance of consent and the indissolubility of the marriage bond nevertheless did not prevent marriage being regarded as an area of civil law at the same time. For the suitor, the changes meant that he tried to obtain the woman's acknowledgement before marriage, and perhaps preferably before the business side of the betrothal was settled. The system thus left plenty of room for identification with *riddarasögur* and the romances of the ballads.

Summary

The new themes in literature and the development of a 'love codex' characterized by cultured language, self-control, and moderation is interpreted by Norbert Elias as an unintentional product of the development of the state and the increasingly complex society of the Middle Ages where new, competing social groups made the sublime an important status symbol for the aristocracy. When the warrior ideals of *Sverris saga* were exchanged for the careful approach to the opposite sex in *Strengleikar*, this can be explained by the new functions of the Norwegian aristocracy.

In the thirteenth century, the aristocracy became more closely bound to the central apparatus of government. Liegemen were expected to form elite forces at the disposition of the Crown, a function which quickly led to a feeling of camaraderie among the king's liegemen and other aristocrats. Moreover, an increasingly powerful state led to a need for corps of civil servants. To be a liegeman no longer meant only fighting, but also an obligation to work with the central civil administration. Even if warrior ideals still had fertile ground on which to grow, young men at the king's court encountered new thinking that offered an alternative to the heroic conceptions of love they had heard at home. The Church's doctrine of consent and the emotional bond of marriage was, by all indications, well-received by the aristocracy at the end of the thirteenth and beginning of the fourteenth centuries. Love in the *riddarasögur* became popular first and foremost because it was removed from the traditional discourse of honour. For the man, being in love was no longer a sign of weakness, but a symbol of his good nature. Skills connected to a new aesthetic of love became a new way in which to distinguish oneself. The art of love bound the aristocracy together, instead of separating otherwise equal men and families. Loving was no longer life-threatening, but a sign of class belonging.

A similar pacification is evident with regard to women's love. Courtly ladies were to control their desires and be faithful and humble. Here we see a nascent tendency

¹⁷⁵ This is in accordance with the marriage cases in Ely in the fourteenth century. Of 122 cases, 89 marriages were contracted without being announced beforehand, but initiated through consent. Some went to another town in order to find a priest that could marry them if they met local resistance; see Michael M. Sheehan, 'The Formation and Stability of Marriage in Fourteenth-Century England: Evidence of an Ely Register', *Mediaeval Studies*, 33 (1971), 228–63.

towards the transfer of responsibility for love relationships from men to women, thus linking women's honour more closely to their sexuality. The individualistic potential in courtly love, however, had a more limited influence. Even if consent was accepted as a formal requirement for a valid marriage, love continued to be valued in relation to objective norms rather than subjective feelings.

Despite the *hirð* aristocracy's significance in the development of new love mentalities, there are some jarring elements in Elias's explanatory model. It was the *king* and *clerics* who were responsible for the translation of European courtly literature; the secular aristocracy did not become a driving force until the second half of the thirteenth century. King Hákon wanted — just as King Sverrir had — for his warriors to be like lions in war and like lambs in peacetime. The heroes of the *riddarasögur* were ideal examples for those who represented the Crown.

The clerics, for their part, were engaged with courtly literature for different reasons. First, it gave the translators an opportunity to emphasize general Christian ideals. Second, clerics could use courtly love stories as cultural capital. The group who probably made the most use of these new ideals were the chapter clerics. They had administrative duties at court, and may have felt a need to distinguish themselves from others in the *hirð*. At the same time, they were detached from the Church's jurisdiction and had perhaps different norms from the higher-ranking clerics.¹⁷⁶ Third, the new ideal of love was connected to consent and indissoluble marriage. In Norwegian courtly literature, we see a shift from the traditional understanding of consent as a *process* to the canonical understanding of *consensus* as a sacrament and an *act*. Jaeger's thesis that clerics educated the knights in new norms of conduct thus has great relevance for the Norwegian Middle Ages.

For most people, it seems that consent became known and integrated into matrimony by the first half of the fourteenth century. Different sources indicate that it could be profitable, even necessary, for the man to win the woman's will before embarking on a formal courtship. The vow between a man and woman took on definitive meaning. Nevertheless, we do find transitions between old and new: acceptance of consent and marriage as both a spiritual and a civil institution was key to the success of the Church's marital norms in Norway. This is also one of the topics of the next chapter, which takes us back to Iceland.

¹⁷⁶ Sverre Bagge, *Den kongelige kapellgeistlighet, 1150–1319* (Bergen: Universitetsforlaget, 1976), pp. 66–84.

Bridal Quest in Iceland

Political Changes and New Sagas

In the period from 1220 to 1262/64, Iceland was marked by great turmoil. The system of districts presided over by *goðar*, regional chieftains who were responsible for making laws at the Althing, was breaking down. More and more power rested in the hands of ever fewer *goðar*. The concentration of power meant that the compound districts of the remaining *goðar* were compared to kingdoms.¹ The conflicts led to a shift in the relationship between *goðar* and farmers. The farmers became much more dependent on the power of the *goðar* in the period up to 1262/64. Prominent farmers came to be associated with chieftains as their confidants. Groups that had a more specialized military function also gathered around the *goðar*. In the 1240s, Þórðr Sighvatsson kakali formed a regular private army modelled on the Norwegian *hirð*. This was a new form of military specialization which was removed from local society to a certain extent, and which contributed to an increase in the scale, bitterness, and intensity of conflicts.²

In the 1250s, King Hákon Hákonarson began to get more involved in Icelandic politics. In 1258, Gizurr Þorvaldsson became earl under King Hákon. He swore he would get Icelanders to pay tribute to the Norwegian king and committed himself to follow Norwegian *hirð* laws when in Iceland. In 1262/64, the Icelanders swore allegiance to the Norwegian king but sought to retain certain rights; it was particularly important to them to retain Icelandic law. *Jónsbók*, an adaptation of the Norwegian *Landslög*, was adopted in Iceland in 1281, but the laws of *Grágás* continued to be

¹ Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, *Chieftains and Power in the Icelandic Commonwealth*, The Viking Collection, 12 (Odense: Odense University Press, 1999).

² Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, *Chieftains and Power*; Hans Jacob Orning, 'Statsutvikling i Norge og på Island i høymiddelalderen belyst ut fra en analyse av Þórðr kakali Sighvatssons og Sverre Sigurdssons vei til makten', *Historisk Tidsskrift*, 76 (1997), 469–86 (pp. 479–82).

used and particular amendments issued for Iceland. The country was led by the king's representative (*hirðstjóri*), two law-speakers, and twelve district governors. After the fall of the free state, the higher aristocracy became a unified body in the king's service who were more clearly distinguished from the farming population.³

Remarkably enough, it is the period from about 1230 to 1280 that many regard as the golden age of saga writing: masterpieces such as *Laxdæla saga*, *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, *Njáls saga*, and *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu* are thought to have had their literary development in those years. From the end of the thirteenth century, there was a growing interest in writing sagas about the mystical forefathers of the Icelanders in the time before settlement (*fornaldarsögur Norðrlanda*) and about knights from distant lands (*fornaldarsögur Suðrlanda* or the Icelandic *riddarasögur*). This interest shaped new literary worlds which Icelanders of the late Middle Ages filled with heroes that reflected their ideals and conceptions of the past and foreign lands. Icelanders also continued to write sagas about the time after the settlement. Large compilations of sagas were produced in the late Middle Ages, an enormous achievement in a period associated with literary decline and bad taste. As a historian, it is not my task to distinguish between 'good' and 'bad' taste; however, changes in literary taste are an interesting phenomenon which can tell us something about shifts in thought and attitudes among a wide variety of the population.

From the perspective of a history of mentalities, the identification of the literary milieus behind the sagas is important. Traditionally, saga writing has been linked closely to the learned aristocracy; the decline in literary taste beginning in the fourteenth century symbolized in many ways the ebbing vitality of the Icelandic population. Later literary historians put much more emphasis on the fact that the literary milieus of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were so dynamic and creative in spite of everything that they were able not only to preserve the earlier literary tradition in countless manuscripts, but also to incorporate new literary ideals and concepts into saga writing.⁴ The Icelandic aristocracy had a vested interest in the preservation of family and legendary sagas because they could trace their lineage back to heroes like Hrólfkraki, Ragnarr loðbrók, and Sigurðr Fáfnisbani.⁵

There is nevertheless no evidence pointing to a clear distinction between aristocratic and ecclesiastical saga-writing. Clerics and monks were commissioned by aristocrats

³ Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, 'The Icelandic Aristocracy after the Fall of the Free State', *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 20 (1995), 153–66.

⁴ Cf. Jürg Glauser, *Isländische Märchensagas: Studien zur Prosaliteratur im spätmittelalterlichen Island*, Beiträge zur nordischen Philologie, 12 (Basel: Helbing & Lichtenhahn, 1983), pp. 229–33.

⁵ Stephen A. Mitchell, *Heroic Sagas and Ballads* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 123–24; Margaret Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes: Old Norse Myths in Medieval Northern Society*, vol. II: *The Reception of Norse Myths in Medieval Iceland*, The Viking Collection, 10 (Odense: Odense University Press, 1998), pp. 97–121.

to carry out writing assignments.⁶ Many of the manuscripts of ‘secular’ sagas of Icelanders and legendary sagas were only preserved in the libraries of churches and monasteries.⁷ One manuscript may contain different saga genres; there is little indication that either secular or clerical audiences were interested in only one type of saga.⁸ Themes like love and marriage can be found in all the traditional saga genres.⁹

What this means is that the milieu in which a saga originated and its intended audience cannot be determined on the basis of the genre classifications imposed in later times. Instead, each saga must be assessed individually, looking at its plot, its moral viewpoint, and the societal and personal issues it takes up.¹⁰ In this chapter, I would like to take as my starting point a saga which was, by all indications, written in the period 1250–70, that is, around the end of the free state period. The saga tells the story of perhaps the most famous love affair in saga literature, the relationship between Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir and Kjartan Ólafsson. *Laxdæla saga* also contains an unusual number of weddings — so many, in fact, that I believe it reflects a particular ideology on the part of the saga author. This is an essential point, because *consensus* did not become law in Iceland until Bishop Árni Þorláksson’s Christian law was adopted at Skálholt in 1275. The relationship between secular legislation and Church law surrounding marriage resembles the pattern we saw in Norway. *Jónsbók*, the secular book of law for Iceland from 1281, sets the terms for the financial marriage contract and denies inheritance rights to daughters who marry against their fathers’ will. Árni’s Christian law defines what makes a marriage valid in the first place.¹¹

Analysis of *Laxdæla saga* will provide the foundation for answering the central questions posed in this chapter: Did the woman’s ability to choose her husband gain

⁶ Lars Lönnroth, ‘Sponsors, Writers, and Readers of Early Norse Literature’, in *Social Approaches to Viking Studies*, ed. by Ross Samson (Glasgow: Cruithne Press, 1991), pp. 3–10.

⁷ Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards, *Legendary Fiction in Medieval Iceland*, Studia Islandica, 30 (Reykjavík: Bókautgáfa Menningarsjóðs and Heimspekideild Háskóla Íslands, 1971), p. 19.

⁸ Mitchell, *Heroic Sagas*, pp. 8–43; Marianne E. Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance in Medieval Iceland*, Islandica, 46 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), pp. 6–7.

⁹ Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance*, pp. 9–24.

¹⁰ Cf. Ármann Jakobsson, ‘Le Roi Chevalier: The Royal Ideology and Genre of *Hrólfs saga kraka*’, *Scandinavian Studies*, 71 (1999), 139–66.

¹¹ Jb V 1. Árni’s Christian law made it clear that the suitor should make an official agreement sealed by handclasp with the woman herself, as well as with her guardian: ‘eg festi þic mer til eiginnar kono eptir guds logom og heilagra feðra setning oc ertu min loglig eigin kona heþan af’ (Kristinn réttir Árna biskups, in *NGL*, v, ch. 23, p. 37). Árni’s Christian law was recognized in the northern bishopric of Hólar in 1354. The formulas used at betrothals in late medieval Iceland referred to both secular and Christian laws; see Agnes S. Arnórsdóttir, ‘Two Models of Marriage? Canon Law and Icelandic Marriage Practice in the Late Middle Ages’, in *Nordic Perspectives on Medieval Canon Law*, ed. by Mia Korpiola, Publications of Matthias Calonius Society, 2 (Saarijärvi: Matthias Calonius Society, 1999), pp. 79–92 (pp. 84–86).

ground as a necessary and sufficient basis for marriage? Did love become pacified and linked to marriage in Iceland as well? How did Christian society relate to older ideas of heroic consent? Did it require a change in gender roles?

Women Choosing Men in Laxdæla saga

Laxdæla saga depicts more active women than any other saga of Icelanders.¹² For this reason, it has been suggested that the saga was either written or translated by a woman.¹³ Others argue that the saga is really about women who do not get what they truly want. The main character of the saga, Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir, finds time and again that decisions are made over her head. The saga thus reveals in an indirect way the lack of influence women had over their own lives.¹⁴ But despite this, it seems as if *Laxdæla saga* is trying to make an issue of a woman's ability to function in society on the same level as a man.¹⁵

The purpose of this part of the chapter is to examine the saga's conception of the relationship between love, marriage, and the limits of individual choice as set by parents and social norms. Is women's own consent portrayed as necessary and desirable, and how does it stand in relation to the will of the *giptingarmaðr*? Does it then express ecclesiastical or aristocratic ideas of the place of women's consent in society?

Women's Consent as Necessary for a Good Marriage

The saga can roughly be divided into two parts, the second of which begins with the introduction of Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir. From that point on, the saga is dominated by a love triangle between Guðrún, Kjartan Ólafsson, and Bolli Þorleiksson. The first part of the saga is more harmonious than the second. The story of the woman settler Unnr in djúpúðga ('the deep-minded') making a home in Iceland serves as a sort of prologue to the saga. The saga makes a point of describing how Unnr manages to arrange good marriages for her many grandchildren. All six daughters of Þorsteinn rauðr, Unnr's dead son, are married off to good men. The most detailed account is of

¹² Robert Cook, 'Women and Men in the *Laxdæla saga*', *Skáldskaparmál*, 2 (1992), 34–59 (p. 57): 'It is a woman-centred saga in a positive sense, exhibiting in rich abundance the ways that women can live and control their destinies.'

¹³ Helga Kress, 'Meget samstavet må det tykkes deg: Om kvinneopprør og genretvang i *Sagaen om Laksdølene*', (*Swedish*) *Historisk Tidskrift*, 100 (1980), 266–80.

¹⁴ Alison Finlay, 'Betrothal and Women's Autonomy in *Laxdæla Saga* and the Poets' Sagas', *Skáldskaparmál*, 4 (1997), 107–28 (pp. 120–26).

¹⁵ Loren Auerbach, 'Female Experience and Authorial Intention in *Laxdæla saga*', *Saga-Book*, 25 (1998), 30–52.

the wedding of Óláfr feilan, Unnr's grandson and heir. Unnr believes that Óláfr has become old enough to marry and she wants to find a suitable wife for him. Óláfr himself is passive with regard to the choice; he leaves the matter entirely in Unnr's hands. Nor do we hear anything of his future wife's will. It is nevertheless clear that this arranged marriage is happy and fruitful; the saga notes that many important men and women are descended from Óláfr feilan.

Óláfr *chooses* to leave the choice of his mate to Unnr in the same way that the rest of her grandchildren do not dispute her authority. A good marriage is built on a shared understanding of what is best for the household, society, and the marriage partners themselves. In this part of the saga, harmony exists first and foremost because Unnr always finds the right mate for her grandchildren, men as well as women. The saga's prologue gives an image of an 'age of innocence', where tensions between different ideas of a good match do not exist. Thus, women's consent is not a theme of the saga in the settlement period.

However, women's consent is introduced rather quickly afterward when Unnr's granddaughter, Þorgerðr Þorsteinsdóttir, is widowed. Her sorrow shows that her first — arranged — marriage had been a happy one. She goes to live with relatives in Norway because she can no longer bear to live in Iceland. A short time later, a landowner asks for her hand, and because she is now a widow she is able to answer for the courtship herself.¹⁶ Although the suitor is not handsome, he is strong, a good warrior, and a well-regarded landowner. Before Þorgerðr commits herself, she discusses the matter with her family. They encourage her to accept. Here there is no question of a conflict between the individual's wishes and the family's evaluations; Þorgerðr's own consent and the family's acknowledgement makes it certain that the marriage will turn out well. And 'love soon grew up between them', the saga confirms.¹⁷

That a widow could have a say in whom she married was not a great innovation for the audience of *Laxdæla saga*. But Þorgerðr's consent is only a forerunner of betrothals in which an unmarried woman could express her opinion of a suitor. This has happened by the next generation. Hǫskuldr, Þorgerðr's son, wants to court Jörunn Bjarnardóttir:

hon var væn kona ok ofláti mikill ok skörungur mikill í vitsmunum. Sá þótti þá kostur beztr í öllum Vestfirðum. Af þessi konu hefir Hǫskuldr frétt, ok þat með, at Björn var beztr bóndi á öllum Ströndum. Hǫskuldr reið heiman með tíunda mann ok sækir heim Björn bónda í Bjarnarfjörð. Hǫskuldr fékk þar góðar viðtökur, því at Björn kunni góð skil á honum. Síðan vekr Hǫskuldr bönorð, en Björn svarar því vel ok kvazk þat hyggja, at dóttir hans myndi eigi vera betr gipt, en veik þó til hennar ráða. En er þetta mál var við Jörunni rætt, þá svarar hon á þessa leið: 'Þann einn spurðaga hǫfu vér til þín, Hǫskuldr, at vér viljum þessu vel svara, því at vér hyggjum, at fyrir þeirri konu sé vel sét, er þér er gipt, en þó mun faðir minn mestu af ráða, þi at ek mun því

¹⁶ Þorgerðr's second marriage parallels quite well with the laws of the Icelandic Commonwealth; cf. Gr. 1b, 29; cf. 1b, 30; II, 156, 162.

¹⁷ Lxd ch. 7, p. 15: 'takask með þeim góðar ástir'.

samþykkjask hér um, sem hann vill.’ En hvart sem at þessum málum var setit lengr eða skemr, þá var þat af ráðit, at Jórunn var fóstnuð Hǫskuldi með miklu fê. [. . .] Hǫskuldr gerisk nú hǫfðingi mikill; hann var ríkr ok kappsamr, ok skortir eigi fê. [. . .] Stóð nú ráðahagr Hǫskulds með miklum blóma ok virðingu. (Lxd ch. 9, pp. 16–19)

She [Jórunn] was a beautiful woman, very high-minded, and most impressive in wisdom. People thought that she was the best match in all Vestfirðir. Hǫskuldr had heard about this woman, and also that Björn [Jórunn’s father] was the best farmer in all Strandir. Hǫskuldr left home with ten men, and rode to Björn bóndi at his home in Bjarnarfjörðr. Hǫskuldr was given a friendly reception, because Björn had heard much about him. Then Hǫskuldr made a proposal, and Björn answered well and said that he thought his daughter could not be better married, but he nevertheless referred the matter to her. When the matter was related to Jórunn, she then answered in this manner: ‘We have heard such things about you, Hǫskuldr, that we want to answer this well, since we think that a woman would be fortunate to be married to you. But my father shall have most to say, since in this matter I will consent to what he wants.’ But whether the matter was discussed at length or not, the outcome was that Jórunn was betrothed to Hǫskuldr with much property. [. . .] Hǫskuldr now became a great chieftain. He was powerful and ambitious, and did not lack wealth. [. . .] Hǫskuldr now increased greatly in standing and honour.

There are a number of circumstances worth calling attention to in this betrothal. Firstly, we see how the publicly stated opinion of individuals has a great significance for the parties involved. Hǫskuldr, Björn, and Jórunn have already heard of each other, but whether they have ever met is unimportant to the saga writer. Their social status, appearance, and personal qualities are known far and wide and are the basis for both Hǫskuldr’s courtship and Björn’s and Jórunn’s acceptance. This is in keeping with the ideal of equality we saw in the contemporary sagas.

Secondly, we see that Jórunn herself has been given a sort of veto on the match. This is a formal choice to which she has no legal right according to *Grágás*. She has not been married before, and she is not over twenty years old. However, giving the woman the ability to choose is not out of place considering the social significance of this marriage. Hǫskuldr’s and Jórunn’s families are forming an important alliance, and they want it to be healthy. Great wealth is being invested in the marriage. Jórunn and Hǫskuldr will both attain a new social position: through the property belonging to their household, through the personal qualities they bring to their roles as husband and wife, and through the children of their union.

Nevertheless, we see that it is up to the woman to decide on the whole venture. What seems to make this possible is that Jórunn’s indirect consent is not based on love in the modern sense. She bases her consent on a rational, not a romantic, evaluation of the suitor. It is striking that Jórunn and Hǫskuldr do not meet before the marriage, and they do not talk much together after they are married, either, but love grows between them anyway. The saga emphasizes the compatibility of their personal qualities: they are equals, and not just in terms of finances. Each derives honour from marriage to the other: she from his ambition and great initiative in the

district, and he from the intelligence, kindness, and noble bearing of his wife, who soon shows herself to be a capable and loyal lady of the house. As they have children, their wealth grows, and the household expands, they manage through their marriage to come out on top in society.

Jórunn gives her consent to marry Hǫskuldr indirectly, but she is really just consenting to her father's decision. The episode shows that societal harmony is ensured; father and daughter are on the same page: they share the same norms regarding the right husband. But what if father and daughter disagree — whom does the saga then support? Again, one generation goes by before the saga gives an example of women exercising self-will. Hǫskuldr's son, Óláfr pá ('Peacock'), wants to marry Þorgerðr Egilsdóttir. They propose the courtship to Egill Skallagrímsson. He has only heard good things of Óláfr Hǫskuldsson and is happy to have his daughter marry such a handsome, famous, and well-born man. But Egill has neither the desire nor the ability to marry Þorgerðr off without her consent: 'because there is no man that can have Þorgerðr contrary to her will'.¹⁸ Þorgerðr refuses her consent. She knows that Óláfr is illegitimate, the son of Hǫskuldr and his concubine Melkorka. Þorgerðr thus accuses her father of not loving her because he wants her to marry the son of a slave-woman. In the saga, her criticism of Óláfr seems surprising; by this point, the reader knows that Melkorka has turned out to be the daughter of the Irish king.

Egill has to confess that the courtship has hit a snag. Hǫskuldr understands Egill and does not blame him for respecting his daughter's will. However, Óláfr does not give up so easily. Despite the fact that Egill acknowledges him, he regards Þorgerðr's refusal as a *svívirðingaorð*, a 'word of disgrace' which affords him shame and dishonour. Therefore, he goes to Þorgerðr himself. He has never met her before, but recognizes her by her beautiful clothes. He puts on the scarlet clothes given to him by King Haraldr gráfeldr and the gilded helmet and sword he received from King Mýrkjartan in Ireland. He sits down to talk to Þorgerðr. Nothing of their conversation is recorded in the saga, but by the end of the day Óláfr speaks to Egill of renewing his proposal. This time, Þorgerðr lets her father settle the matter as he sees fit. Once again the father's consent is decisive, but it is combined with the woman's will.

This episode is especially interesting because it is also mentioned in *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, written about forty years earlier. That saga notes only that Egill 'had good knowledge of Óláfr, and knew that this was a good marriage. Þorgerðr was thus married to Óláfr'.¹⁹ In *Egils saga*, neither Óláfr's illegitimate birth nor Þorgerðr's consent is considered an issue. It might appear that *Laxdæla saga* is manufacturing tensions around Þorgerðr's choice: will she really turn down the best man in Iceland? How can the tangle of Þorgerðr's and her father's different values be resolved while maintaining the honour of all parties? In *Laxdæla saga*, the

¹⁸ Lxd ch. 23, p. 63: 'því at þat er eignum manni færi, at fá Þorgerdi án hennar vilja'.

¹⁹ Egs ch. 78, p. 242: 'Egill kunni qll deili á Óláfi ok vissi, at þat gjaforð var gøfugt, ok fyrir því var Þorgerðr gipt Óláfi.'

tensions are resolved by the meeting between the suitor and the woman. Þorgerðr herself must be convinced that Óláfr is man enough. In this case, conversation between a man and woman before marriage takes on a positive significance because the woman gets the chance to evaluate the suitor's qualities. Flirting — though in a relatively controlled form — thus contributes to a good and equal match. The responsibility for responding to the suitor is shifted to the unmarried woman.

But what about bad marriages, and who is portrayed as making the wrong assessment in such instances: the suitor, the woman, or her guardian? A few such marriages are introduced into the story at about the same time that Óláfr is courting Þorgerðr. They serve as a contrast to the way Þorgerðr relates to Óláfr during their courtship and their subsequent life together. The bad marriages are first and foremost a result of the *giptingarmaðr* not being critical enough with regard to the suitor or letting the woman have her own way. The marriage of Vigdís Ingjaldsdóttir and Þórðr goddi is a typical example of what could happen under such circumstances. Vigdís is 'married off more for the sake of money than for good help'.²⁰ That Þórðr is rich is not exactly a disadvantage, but in his case it is his only advantage. Vigdís soon shows that she is the stronger partner in the marriage.²¹ When a kinsman of Vigdís later needs help, she cannot promise her husband's support. She explains: 'Þórðr, my husband, is not a brave man.'²² Þórðr allies himself instead with the kinsman's enemies, and Vigdís has to send him away to his uncle. The uncle passes judgement over the couple's actions in this situation as follows: 'I think Vigdís has pursued this case bravely. It is a great harm that such a woman should have a wretch as a husband.'²³ As the conflict unfolds, Vigdís's contempt for her husband turns to hate, and she declares herself divorced from him. Her reasoning bears a strong resemblance to the conception of heroic consent we have encountered in earlier sources. What is new about this divorce is that it is put into the context of a woman having been married off without her consent. Good marriages are made when the woman's will is respected by the *giptingarmaðr*.²⁴

The moral for marriage in the first half of the saga is clear: the most important assessment of the suitor is that of the intended bride. Daughters should not be forced into marriage. If parents and daughters do not agree, the daughter should not be coerced. This ethic of consent sets the tone for the drama of the second half of the

²⁰ Lxd ch. 11, p. 21: 'meir gefin til fjár en brautargengis'.

²¹ Lxd ch. 14, p. 31: 'Vigdís var meiri skörungr í skapi en Þórðr, bóndi hennar.'

²² Lxd ch. 14, p. 31: 'Þórðr, bóndi minn er ekki garpmenni mikit.'

²³ Lxd ch. 15, p. 35: 'þykki mér Vigdís þetta mál drengliga hafa farit; er þat mikill harmr, er þvilík kona skal hafa svá óskörlugt gjaforð.'

²⁴ In another case where parents marry their daughter off for money, there is a similar condemnation. This is the marriage between Þuriðr, daughter of Óláfr pá, and the Norwegian Geirmundr gnýr, Lxd chs 29–30. Her consent is not asked for, and the consequences are fatal.

saga. This part focuses on Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir's four marriages, two of which begin with her consent, and two without.

Guðrún's first husband, Þorvaldr Halldórsson, is presented as a rich man and the son of a good man, but 'not terribly brave'.²⁵ Ósvífr warns Þorvaldr that the marriage will not be between *jafnmenni* (equals), but Þorvaldr wants Guðrún anyway. He wants a wife, not money, he says. Þorvaldr is superior in wealth, therefore, but not in personal qualities. Ósvífr determines the settlement, stipulating that Guðrún is to have more precious things than any other woman without any decrease in her fortune. He hopes Guðrún will be pleased with the terms. It is at this point that Guðrún first learns of the agreement between her father and Þorvaldr, and she is not at all pleased with what has taken place. The saga portrays Þorvaldr as committing a fatal mistake when he fails to either assure himself of Guðrún's regard first or urge Ósvífr to let his daughter give her opinion. The marriage does turn out badly. Guðrún demands ever more expensive jewellery and clothing from her husband. Þorvaldr finally loses patience with her and slaps her. She and her good friend Þórðr Ingunnsson then work out a plan for revenge. Guðrún sews a shirt for Þorvaldr with a neck so wide that it could be considered a woman's shirt. Even if Þorvaldr would not think of wearing such a garment, Guðrún shows by making it that she regards him as unable to fulfil his role as a man. Shortly afterward, Guðrún divorces Þorvaldr.

Her accomplice, Þórðr, is himself married to a woman named Auðr, whom he married for money. Therefore, the saga remarks, he loved her little.²⁶ On Guðrún's advice, Þórðr divorces Auðr on the pretext that she wears men's clothes. Guðrún and Þórðr are a better match; both are blessed with strong qualities, and both have had spouses who did not live up to their gender roles. Thus it comes as no surprise when Þórðr asks for Guðrún after their divorces. With Ósvífr things go easily and Guðrún says nothing against the match, the saga relates. Within the saga's marriage ethic the marriage is good; Þórðr is a brave man who does what Guðrún says. It is said that Guðrún is satisfied with less wealth after they are together. It is thus a great tragedy when Þórðr dies a short time later, and Guðrún is once more faced with great sorrow. The scene is set for the drama of the love triangle between Guðrún, Kjartan, and Bolli.

Kjartan Ólafsson grew up with his foster-brother Bolli Þorleiksson, and they are described as the best of men. Nevertheless, the saga emphasizes that no one can equal Kjartan in strength, courage, and appearance. His foster-brother gets a briefer description; he is simply next to Kjartan in everything. Try as he might, Bolli cannot

²⁵ Lxd ch. 34, p. 93: 'auðigr maðr ok engi hetja'.

²⁶ Lxd ch. 32, p. 87: 'Þórðr var vænn maðr ok vaskligr, gorr at sér ok sakamaðr mikill. Þórðr átti systur þeira Þorkels, er Auðr hét; ekki var hon væn kona né gorrvilig. Þórðr unni henni líti; hafði hann mjök slægzk til fjár.' On the scepticism of rich people without kin and personal qualities in Old Norse society, see William Ian Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking: Feud, Law, and Society in Medieval Iceland* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), pp. 77–109.

— in the view of the saga — be better than Kjartan. This difference eventually becomes the weak spot in the foster-brotherhood.

In their youth, the foster-brothers often visit Ósvífr, at whose home they not infrequently meet Guðrún. Kjartan and Guðrún are soon seen as a perfect match: ‘Everyone said that of those that grew up then, Kjartan and Guðrún were of most equal standing.’²⁷ Kjartan’s father adds that in all of Iceland, only Guðrún is a good enough match for his son. The problem arises when Kjartan travels abroad. He achieves great success at King Óláfr Tryggvason’s court and even attracts the attention and good will of Ingibjörg, the King’s sister. Ingibjörg is later married to Earl Rögnvaldr Úlfsson, one of King Óláfr Haraldsson’s right-hand men. According to Icelandic saga tradition, her sister Ástriðr had refused the powerful chieftain Erlingr Skjalgsson. King Óláfr Tryggvason even encourages Kjartan to ask for Ingibjörg’s hand; he clearly regards the Iclander as a good match for his sister. Kjartan has grown too big for the Icelandic marriage market when he is found eligible to marry women in the royal family.

When Kjartan drags his feet about going back to Iceland, Bolli sees his chance to secure the best match in Iceland. At first Guðrún turns him down. As long as Kjartan is alive, she does not want to marry another. But with Ósvífr’s persuasion she marries Bolli after all. Ósvífr’s overriding of his daughter’s will is a sure sign the marriage is not going to work out. Guðrún makes Bolli’s married life chilly: ‘Their life together did not amount to much, and that was caused most by Guðrún.’²⁸

When Kjartan comes back to Iceland, he does not make any trouble about Bolli’s marriage to Guðrún. Ingibjörg has given him a headdress which is meant as a bridal gift for Guðrún. Instead another woman, Hrefna Ásgeirsdóttir, tries on the headdress. After a moment’s hesitation Kjartan says that the headdress suits her, and shortly thereafter they marry. Through her marriage to Kjartan, Hrefna attains a new position as first lady of Iceland; she, and not Guðrún, is the wearer of the most beautiful item of apparel in the country. The imbalance that has arisen between Bolli and Kjartan, Guðrún and Hrefna, must be rectified. The conflict comes to a head when Guðrún succeeds in urging Bolli to kill Kjartan. Later, Kjartan’s kinsmen avenge him by killing Bolli.

Good marriages in *Laxdæla saga* are closely bound up with the woman’s consent. The saga is pervaded by the idea that a man and woman who marry should be *jafnræði*, equals, an evaluation that should be left to the woman from the beginning of negotiations. The saga’s last marriage negotiations, between Bolli Bollason and Þórdís Snorradóttir, establishes that the young woman ‘shall have the man who she thinks suits her well’.²⁹ Þórdís is duly asked what she thinks of Bolli, but submissively and

²⁷ Lxd ch. 39, p. 112: ‘Þat var allra manna mál, at með þeim Kjartani ok Guðrúnu þætti vera mest jafnræði þeirra manna, er þá óxu upp.’

²⁸ Lxd ch. 43, p. 130: ‘Ekki var mart í samförum þeira Bolla af Guðrúnar hendi.’

²⁹ Lxd ch. 70, p. 206: ‘hon skal þann einn mann eiga, at henni sé vel at skapi’.

properly leaves the final decision to her father. Her father does not betroth his daughter to Bolli until he is sure she has nothing against the marriage. Thus the marriage does turn out well and love grows between them.³⁰ Along with Guðrún's last marriage to Þorkell Eyjólfsson (which is an equal marriage where Þorkell respects Guðrún and she reciprocates by showing a measure of submission to her husband), it represents the saga's last marriage and a return to the harmony of the age of settlement.

The saga puts great trust in women's judgement all along. This pattern has consequences for men who want to court women of high standing. The key the saga itself gives to interpreting Guðrún's four marriages is a good illustration of the consequences that await a man who courts a woman who does not suit him. In her youth, Guðrún has a dream about her four future husbands.³¹ The first, Þorvaldr, is like a headdress she does not like and she throws it into the stream. Þórðr is a valuable silver ring she wants to own, and which suits her perfectly. It falls into the water by accident, something that pains her deeply. Bolli resembles a gold ring; the noble material does not represent Bolli's qualities, but the fact that he has taken a new faith. The gold ring has many flaws, which mean that the marriage is not as good as the gold might suggest. In the fourth marriage, the husband (Þorkell Eyjólfsson) is like a heavy golden helmet: beautiful and valuable, but also so burdensome that she has to walk with a bowed head, a sign of her increased submission.

In Guðrún's dream, her husbands are compared to headdresses and ornaments. We remember that Guðrún was very preoccupied with getting fine clothes in her first marriage, but this was to no avail as long as her husband did not 'suit' her; then, even the most beautiful clothes were no help. With Þórðr, therefore, she did not demand beautiful and expensive clothes; he was 'adornment' enough in himself. The only man in Guðrún's life who was not represented in her dream was the man she loved most, Kjartan. But in relation to him as well, the subject of adornment is central. The headdress Kjartan had received from Ingibjörg in Norway was the most beautiful in Iceland, just as Kjartan was the best man. Guðrún never got to adorn herself with the headdress or Kjartan, and in the same way that she made sure the headdress was taken from Hrefna, she was behind the actions that took the best man from Hrefna as well. The imbalance created through Guðrún's social downgrading by her marriage to the next best man makes incitement to killing the last solution for her to reestablish her social standing.

Bolli wants to raise himself to being the best man in Iceland through his marriage to Guðrún. A woman's proud bearing could give social prestige to the man who married her because it defined the social level he occupied. That is why it is so tempting for Bolli to seek Guðrún as his wife. He has to live with the consequences of his choice afterward. Guðrún requires of him actions he cannot live up to. He finds himself faced with the choice of either living the rest of his life with Guðrún's demand

³⁰ Lxd ch. 70, p. 207: 'Bolli var í Tungu, ok tókusk brátt góðar ástir með þeim Þórðisi.'

³¹ Lxd ch. 33.

that he be better than Kjartan, or of killing his own foster-brother. Whatever Bolli has gained by his marriage will be lost no matter which path he chooses. The value of having the best woman in Iceland could have given Bolli great symbolic capital. But in *Laxdæla saga* it is made clear that the woman's acknowledgement and goodwill must also be present, otherwise the disparity between the spouses will show up the lack of cultural capital of the husband.³² In other circumstances more successful courtships are depicted. The landowner who courts Þorgerðr Þorsteinsdóttir wins her. The saga notes that people thought he improved his standing with such an extraordinary wife at his side. The respected woman's own consent also helps his social status increase.

The saga depicts courtship as a defining phase in a man's life, when the object of his desire must be chosen with circumspection.³³ That a man wins honour by winning a woman's will and acknowledgement is nothing new, but in *Laxdæla saga* the woman's will is linked more closely than ever before with the process of contracting the marriage. The woman's will is given a fundamentally positive social function. Instead of threatening the balance of honour between men, her choice is an affirmation of the relationship between the households of the *giptingarmaðr* and suitor.

The connection between women's consent and good, lasting marriages is so clear in *Laxdæla saga* that it is tempting to conclude that the saga's author consciously sought to create a unified ideology of consent that brought together the Church's doctrine of consent and the Norse concept of equality. Was this synthesis accelerated by the clerics, or could Icelandic aristocrats also have had an interest in such an ideology regarding women's matrimonial choices?

Consent Ideology: Ecclesiastical or Aristocratic?

Laxdæla saga has been regarded as the reflection of a new aristocratic view of Icelandic society in the mid-thirteenth century. At the same time, there is no doubt that the author was also writing from a Christian viewpoint; great emphasis is laid on Guðrún's activities as a church-builder and nun in the last part of the saga. The great romantic drama between Guðrún and Kjartan certainly builds on the old heroic stories of Brynhildr, Sigurðr, Guðrún, and Gunnarr. This interest in the heroes of the

³² See Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, *Fortælling og ære: Studier i islændingesagaerne* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1995), pp. 260–65. Else Mundal suggests that men might have wanted to marry strong-minded women because children were thought to inherit their character from both their parents. Thus the children of strong-minded mothers would be stronger; see Else Mundal, 'The Position of Women in Old Norse Society and the Basis for their Power', *Nora: Nordic Journal for Women's Studies*, 1 (1994), 3–11. This says little, however, of the social strategies surrounding the choice of marriage partners. Men seem to be motivated by the prestige of being found worthy of marriage to such a woman.

³³ In a certain sense, there was a public marriage market consisting of 'good' and 'bad' marriages in medieval Iceland, but most often in connection to the local community or districts.

past is also found in such works as Oddr Snorrason's *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, as well as *Heimskringla* and *Gísla saga Súrssonar*. The direct source of inspiration for *Laxdæla saga*, however, was probably not the Sigurðr poems but *Völsunga saga*, a reworking and systematization of the different heroic poems from the 1220s. The social universe in *Völsunga saga*, compared with the heroic poems, has shifted to a more identifiable household structure, and events are strongly reminiscent of *Laxdæla saga*. The poetic cycle surrounding Sigurðr portrayed a conception of heroic consent, something *Laxdæla saga* appears to have made use of, at least as it is presented through *Völsunga saga*.

Brynhildr in *Völsunga saga* is no longer a valkyrie, but an unmarried woman who lives in her father's household. Brynhildr's forced marriage is not a punishment of Óðinn but imposed by her father. But just as in the heroic poems, Brynhildr vows that she will only love the most outstanding man to be born.³⁴ In addition, Sigurðr and Brynhildr bind themselves together by an oath.³⁵ Thus, the vow of mutual fidelity is emphasized and understood in this episode in the context of canonical consent. The breaking of this oath is the reason for the tragic events in *Völsunga saga*. In *Völsunga saga* Brynhildr and Sigurðr even have a child together, Áslaug, who in the thirteenth century was counted as the ancestor of many different families in Iceland. According to canon law, Áslaug could be considered a legitimate daughter if the intercourse was subsequent to the vow of fidelity. This puts Sigurðr's marriage to Guðrún and Brynhildr's marriage to Gunnarr in an even more negative light in the saga and the heroic poems. The saga has problems explaining why Sigurðr violates his oath, but puts the blame on the magic of Grímhildr, the mother of Guðrún and Gunnarr. Sigurðr does not remember his oath until after his marriage to Guðrún, but then tries to act as if nothing is wrong. Brynhildr is married off to Gunnarr, despite telling her father that she has given her word to another man.

In both *Völsunga saga* and *Laxdæla saga* we find a strong interest in what makes two people right for each other. An important factor in both sagas is that heroes and heroines have a similar temperament. When Gunnarr does not entirely understand why Brynhildr despises him, she explains proudly: 'we had a different *eðli*'.³⁶

³⁴ Vls ch. 20, p. 48: 'Enn ek strengda þess heit þar i mot at giptaz engum þeim, er hrædazt kynna.' Vls ch. 29, p. 73: 'Ok þess streingda ek heit heima at fedr mins, at ek munda þeim einum unna, er ageztr væri alinn, enn þat er Sigurdr.'

³⁵ Vls ch. 21, p. 55: 'Sigurdr mellti: "Eingi finnzt þer vitrare madr, ok þess ver ek, at þik skal ek eigha, ok þu ert vid mitt eðe." Hun svarar: "Þik vil ek hellzt eigia, þott ek kiosa um alla menn." Ok þetta bundu þau eidum med ser.'

³⁶ Vls ch. 29, p. 71: 'Ecke hofum ver launþing haft ne udadir giort, ok annat er vart edli, ok fusare verim ver at drepæ ydr.' See also Anne Heinrichs, 'Annat er vart eðli: The Type of the Prepatriarchal Woman in Old Norse Literature', in *Structure and Meaning in Old Norse Literature: New Approaches to Textual Analysis and Literary Criticism*, ed. by John Lindow, Lars Lönnroth, and Gerd Wolfgang Weber, The Viking Collection, 3 (Odense: Odense University Press, 1986), pp. 110–40 (pp. 121–22).

‘Inborn qualities’, ‘nature’, or ‘character’ are perhaps equally accurate translations. The word is not new in *Völsunga saga*, but it is striking how it is used in connection with good marriages. In this brief statement Brynhildr expresses how she and Sigurðr belong to a different order of being than Gunnarr. Such a view of a woman’s inborn qualities has consequences for the men who want to measure up to her.

Laxdæla saga shares a similar aristocratic ideology in the love story of Guðrún and Kjartan. The relationship between the foster-brothers Bolli and Kjartan is determined by their nature or *eðli*. Bolli is forever second best and Kjartan the best. A degree of influence from the *riddarasögur* may have shaped the depiction of the good lovers in *Völsunga saga* and *Laxdæla saga*. Both Guðrún and Kjartan are described as courtly, while Kjartan is not only brave, but also humble and patient.³⁷ ‘Courtliness’ in these sagas has a great deal to do with appearances, expensive ornaments, and gilded weapons, but also how Guðrún wears the ornaments and Kjartan bears the weapons. Kjartan is the man who most clearly represents the ideal of the *riddarasögur* regarding patience and humility (*lítillátr*). This helps to disarm the independent powers of chaos inherent in his visits to Guðrún. The conflicts in *Laxdæla saga* and *Völsunga saga* are not set off by love but by the lack of balance between husbands and wives.

The conception of marriage strategies in *Laxdæla saga* can be called an ideological construction with two foundations: social equality and the woman’s consent. As *Laxdæla saga* conceives the relationship between these two elements, they are not in opposition to one another. On the contrary, the woman is the best judge of which man is her equal. The woman’s choice is in full agreement with society’s norms. It is when her *giptingarmaðr* evaluates the matter differently that a bad marriage is contracted which ends in divorce or killing. For the man, this state of affairs means that he must decide carefully which woman to pursue; an ‘ordinary’ man will not want to test himself against the best woman in the district. This morality of marriage pervades the whole saga.

Seen in the context of other sagas of Icelanders, the saga’s ideology of consent is quite unique (though echoed by the legendary *Völsunga saga*) and so consistent that it was probably inspired by the Christian doctrine. But it is also drastically modified for aristocratic marital interests. Kjartan and Guðrún, Brynhildr and Sigurðr, belong together because of their *eðli*, their nature. *Laxdæla saga* thus forms a synthesis between heroic and Christian understandings of consent which could — if it functioned in reality — be attractive for an aristocracy interested in courtly ideals.

³⁷ Lxd ch. 22; Lxd chs 28, 32; see also Meulengracht Sørensen, *Fortælling*, p. 260, on *Laxdæla saga*: ‘Her er langt til de selvhævdende typer, som sagalitteraturen karakteriserer med ord som *hávaðamaðr* og *óþafnaðarmaðr*.’ On courtliness in *Völsunga saga*, see Agneta Ney, ‘Genus och ideologi i *Völsunga saga*’, in *Fornaldarsagornas struktur och ideologi*, ed. by Ármann Jakobsson, Annette Lassen, and Agneta Ney, *Nordiska texter och undersökningar*, 28 (Uppsala: Swedish Science Press, 2003), pp. 113–22; Stephanie Würth, ‘The Rhetoric of *Völsunga saga*’, in *ibid.*, pp. 101–11.

Use and Criticism of Women's Consent

How representative is *Laxdæla saga* as an expression of changes in Icelanders' perceptions of marriage and consent in the thirteenth century? In order to make an assessment we shall look at how the relationship between love, consent, honour, and society was dealt with in other sagas of Icelanders.

Gísla saga Súrssonar

The main characters and intrigues surrounding love and marriage in *Gísla saga Súrssonar* build, like *Laxdæla saga*, to a large degree on the poems about Sigurðr Fáfnisbani.³⁸ Gísli Súrsson's actions are largely motivated by a desire to maintain the honour of the household, but many have pointed out that the saga questions the heroic moral code.³⁹ Preben Meulengracht Sørensen expresses the relationship between heroic poetry and *Gísla saga* in these terms:

The poetry essentially deals with the conflict between loyalty and tragic betrayal. The same holds true for the saga, but here the old ethical values are challenged and become open to discussion. The old heroic poetry rested on fixed ethical norms, and its heroes and heroines are never in doubt as to how they should act. In *Gísla saga* the situation is quite different. The heroic ethical code is called into question, and most obviously so in those cases where heroic poetry served as a foil and model for the saga.⁴⁰

Earlier we saw that there was a continuity in the heroic conception of love up until the early thirteenth century. Does *Gísla saga* also question the discourse of honour regarding love and marriage? What norms are presented to take their place?

³⁸ The characters of *Gísla saga* and the heroic poems are still not clearly identifiable throughout the saga. The analogues to the heroic narratives are connected to certain situations in the saga, and are thus more contextual and relational than in *Laxdæla saga*, where Guðrún, Bolli, and Kjartan reflect Brynhildr, Gunnarr, and Sigurðr. Gísli Súrsson is, like Sigurðr, a fearless hero, but at the same time he is more like Gunnarr when he opposes his sister's husband. Þórdís, Gísli's sister, is more like Guðrún Gjúkadóttir who is in conflict of loyalty between her husband Atli and her brother Gunnarr. The conflict between the foster-brothers Þorkell and Vésteinn is similar to the rivalry between Gunnarr and Sigurðr. Ásgerðr, wife of Þorkell, has much in common with Brynhildr, while Auðr, the wife of Gísli, reminds us of the first Guðrún, wife of Sigurðr.

³⁹ See Theodore M. Andersson, 'The Displacement of the Heroic Ideal in the Icelandic Sagas', *Speculum*, 45 (1970), 575–93 (pp. 592–93); Thomas Bredsdorff, *Kaos og kærlighed: En studie i islændingesagaers livsbillede*, 2nd edn (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1995), p. 79; and with a slightly different view, Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, *Fortælling*, pp. 314–15.

⁴⁰ Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, 'Murder in Marital Bed: An Attempt at Understanding a Crucial Scene in *Gísla saga*', in *Structure and Meaning in Old Norse Literature*, ed. by Lindow, Lönnroth, and Weber, pp. 235–63 (p. 255).

The relationship between Þórdís and her brother Gísli is the recurring theme in *Gísla saga*. The tensions between them originate in the first chapter of the saga, when the family is still living in Norway. Þórdís is described as an attractive woman in the district; she is both beautiful and clever. Many suitors come to talk to her. The first, Bárðr, claims to have seduced (*fíflði*) Þórdís.⁴¹ Her father tries to keep Bárðr away; he believes the household is dishonoured by his visits. But Bárðr is of the opinion that he can decide for himself whether he visits Þórdís. Gísli wants to defend the honour of the household against unwanted suitors, and so he kills Bárðr. Gísli's brother, Þorkell, takes a different tack. He befriends his sister's suitors, to Gísli's amazement and disappointment. Þorkell even tries to get Bárðr's kinsmen to avenge Bárðr's killing. In the meantime, Þórdís has had a visit from another young man in the district, Kolbjörn. He says he is 'i þingum við' Þórdís, a phrase which can be translated as 'having romantic meetings with' and may indicate a mutuality between the man and the woman.

We are not told what Þórdís thinks when Gísli kills her suitors. However, we should note that the saga makes a distinction between men who encroach on both the woman and her family and men who challenge 'only' the woman's *gíptingarmaðr*. The distinction is made by using the woman's opinion. In the generation before Gísli and Þórdís, which is presented as a foreshadowing of Gísli's conflict with Þórdís's suitors, a berserk wants to take Ari Þorkelsson's wife Ingibjörg away. He challenges Ari to single combat and kills him. Ari's brother takes up the fight and defeats the berserk. He is aided in this by Ingibjörg herself. The saga shows through her actions that she does not want to be with the berserk.⁴²

This emphasis on the woman's opinion of the visiting man puts Þórdís's opinion of her suitors in a more positive light. When the unmarried Þórdís is described as *vitr*, 'intelligent', before Bárðr's visits, it could mean that she would have taken action if she had not liked her suitor. From the saga's point of view, it is natural that Gísli wants to take revenge on the men who seduced his sister, but this is more because they actively dishonour the household in a fundamental way (they claim the right to visit when they please) than because of the seduction in itself. The conflict finally reaches the point that Gísli's family has to leave Norway; the killing of Bárðr sets in motion a blood-feud and division in the district.

Later in the saga, when the family has established itself in Iceland, Þórdís marries Þorgrímr Þorsteinsson. When Gísli and Þorgrímr later become enemies, Þórdís chooses to side with her husband against Gísli. After she is widowed, she prefers to

⁴¹ The other version of the saga uses *gleppja*, 'to beguile', about Kolbjörn's approach. The two versions of the saga have some impact on the narrative and the characters. In AM 149 fol. (Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, Reykjavík), it seems the conflict in which Gísli is involved is not caused by the characters themselves, but by external factors. In AM 556 a 4° (Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, Reykjavík), the conflict is more clearly caused by the moral weakness of Þorkell and the stubborn demand of traditional honour by Gísli; see Meulengracht Sørensen, 'Murder'.

⁴² Gís ch. 1.

marry her late husband's brother rather than go back to her own brother. Gísli sees her actions in the light of heroic poetry and is disappointed when he discovers that his sister does not rally to his side as Guðrún Gjúkadóttir supported her brothers in *Atlakviða*. Her lack of loyalty to Gísli can therefore be interpreted as an expression of her attempt to break free of the household heroic code. According to that interpretation Þórdís becomes a victim of Gísli's pursuit of honour.⁴³

Marital bonds are also put to the test in *Gísla saga*. The major conflict in the saga is unleashed through a conversation between Auðr Vésteinsdóttir, Gísli's wife, and Ásgerðr Þorbjarnardóttir, Þorkell's wife. The two women are talking about the men they loved before they were married. Þorkell overhears the conversation and discovers that his wife would rather have had Vésteinn Vésteinsson, Auðr's brother, as her husband. What Ásgerðr says is that she was more eager to sew shirts for Vésteinn than for Þorkell, a strong symbol that her love and loyalty were not directed to her husband. Þorkell views his wife's love for Vésteinn as a threat to his honour. The solution for Þorkell is the same as for Gunnarr Gjúkasson and Bolli Þorleiksson; the rival must be eliminated. Auðr discovers that Þorkell has been listening and guesses what will happen: 'Women's talk often leads to misfortune.'⁴⁴ It is not because their talk in itself is bad, but because women's feelings for men are charged with latent social dynamite. For the sake of his honour, Þorkell is almost obliged to kill Vésteinn.⁴⁵ On this occasion, paradoxically enough, it is Þorkell who is cast in the role of the overzealous avenger. Ásgerðr tries to convince Þorkell to forget the whole conversation, but to no avail. The avalanche of conflict that will lead to the fall of all the foster-brothers has already been set in motion.

The marriages of Þorkell and Ásgerðr on the one hand, and of Gísli and Auðr on the other, are portrayed as a contrast between two different types of marriage. While Ásgerðr continues to cherish the love of her youth, Auðr says that she has nothing more to do with Þorgrímur Þorsteinsson, who was her youthful sweetheart. Auðr talks openly of this to Gísli and makes it clear that she will be loyal to him. Her support for Gísli is also evident when she shelters her husband after he is condemned to outlawry. She hides him and despises his pursuers. In this part of the saga Gísli is more indisputably a hero, partly because he is now excluded from the social morality he could not quite manage to live by, but also because he now chooses not to let the code of honour dictate all his actions.⁴⁶ This comes out clearly towards the end of the

⁴³ Similar interpretation in Theodore M. Andersson, 'Some Ambiguities in *Gísla saga*: A Balance Sheet', *Bibliography of Old Norse-Icelandic Studies* 1968, 1969, 7–42 (p. 17): 'When she [Þórdís] eventually sides with her second husband Þorkr against Gísli, her choice can hardly be viewed as malice; having lost four men to her brother's lust for honor, she might well feel protective about the fifth.'

⁴⁴ Gís ch. 9, p. 31: 'Opt stender illt af kvennahjali.'

⁴⁵ The saga does not say that Þorkell was the killer of Gísli, but it implies that Þorkell is deeply involved in the murder; see Bredsdorff, *Kaos og kærlighed*, p. 73.

⁴⁶ See Andersson, 'Some Ambiguities', p. 40.

saga when Gísli refrains from taking revenge on his brother's killers for Auðr's sake; they are, as it turns out, her brothers. The bond of marriage here takes precedence over the duty to defend one's honour; Gísli realizes at last that there is something more important than a household's honour, namely *maritalis affectio*. This is perhaps the most important difference between *Gísli saga* and earlier sagas of Icelanders. It is also why there is only one divorce in the saga. After her husband kills Gísli, Þórdís no longer wants to share his bed. This can be interpreted as a reaction to his failure to renounce his feelings of duty and instead respect her emotions.

It has been argued that at least the last part of the saga, which deals with Gísli's outlawry, is influenced by Christian ideals, something that could have come through in the portrayal of Gísli and Auðr's marriage.⁴⁷ However, it is characteristic of this saga that the woman's will is given superficial treatment even at the time of the marriage. The question of the woman's consent is a much more prominent theme in many of the sagas in the period after *Gísli saga*.

Víga-Glúms saga

Central to *Víga-Glúms saga* is the rivalry for Þórdís Gizurardóttir. She is considered a good match.⁴⁸ Þorgrímur Þórisson, described as a talented man, courts her. Everyone — including his kinsmen and hers — consider them to be *jafnræði* or equal. Nevertheless, Þorgrímur does not get to marry her; her father turns him down. No reason is given, and it is clear that Þorgrímur considers himself dishonoured by the refusal. That he is not found worthy of Þórdís makes him fear public loss of face.

Then another unmarried man, Arnórr rauðkinnr, sees his chance to try for Þórdís. The problem is that his status is no higher than that of Þorgrímur Þórisson, so how can he expect to get her? If Þorgrímur had not been refused, Arnórr might have been regarded as equal (*jafnræði*), he believes. But Arnórr has an ace in the hole. He wants his powerful kinsman Víga-Glúmr Eyjólfsson to ask for Þórdís on his behalf and offer her father his friendship. Víga-Glúmr hesitantly agrees. He finds the matter rather complicated since Þorgrímur and his family and friends will regard it as shameful if Arnórr gets Þórdís. Þórdís's father must therefore think carefully when Víga-Glúmr asks for his daughter for Arnórr. He is afraid of making too many enemies if he says yes. But when Víga-Glúmr threatens to withdraw his friendship, his mind is made up. Arnórr succeeds in getting Þórdís, and Þorgrímur tries to take vengeance.

⁴⁷ See Peter Foote, 'An Essay on the Saga of Gísli and its Icelandic Background', in *The Saga of Gísli*, trans. by George Johnston (London: Dent, 1963), pp. 93–134 (pp. 119–23).

⁴⁸ Vgs chs 10–11. *Víga-Glúms saga* is usually dated to around the 1230s; see Theodore M. Andersson, 'Snorri Sturluson and the Saga School at Munkaþverá', in *Snorri Sturluson: Kolloquium anlässlich der 750. Wiederkehr seines Todestages*, ed. by Alois Wolf, ScriptOralia, 51 (Tübingen: Narr, 1993), pp. 9–25 (pp. 19–20); Jónas Kristjánsson, *Eddas and Sagas: Iceland's Medieval Literature*, 3rd edn (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1997), p. 239.

He steals all the ale to be served at the wedding. Víga-Glúmr is then obliged to take the offensive against Þorgrímr and his kinsmen. The conflict, however, ends peacefully with Víga-Glúmr arranging for Þorgrímr to get Þórdís's sister as his bride. The balance between Þorgrímr and Arnórr is restored.

In a variety of ways, this episode illustrates the attitudes to contracting a marriage in *Víga-Glúms saga*. The saga is concerned throughout with the fact that in courtship, the social balance between men is at stake. Finding a good match is important for men's status, but the strong women in the saga have little to say about their own betrothals. But in this case, women's will is not the solution to how one finds the right mate. This saga emphasizes instead the ability of strong chieftains to regulate arranged marriages so that social balance is achieved.⁴⁹

When it comes time for Víga-Glúmr, the most powerful chieftain in the saga, to choose a wife, he courts Halldóra, daughter of the rich and powerful Gunnsteinn. Halldóra is regarded as 'the best match, both because of her relatives and because she herself was wise and clever'.⁵⁰ For Víga-Glúmr, her family's consent is more important than her own: 'I want this marriage, if her relatives consent.' By his inquiry he shows that he regards himself as equal to Halldóra's family, and through her family's consent to the marriage this is publicly confirmed. The courtship is a public test of the status a man has in society, and Víga-Glúmr passes the test; now 'his standing was even more honourable than before'.⁵¹

The lack of emphasis on women's consent at the beginning of marriage gives lasting consent a much greater significance. Just as a man must be acknowledged by the woman's *giptingarmaðr* before the courtship, he must live up to the woman's requirements after they are married.⁵² This means that divorce initiated by the woman is relatively common in the saga. Þorlaug Glúmsdóttir is married off to Víga-Skúta but divorces him because they cannot agree.⁵³ Another example is Þórdís Bjarnardóttir, who leaves Arngrímr Þorgrímsson because he kills his foster-brother and Þórdís's good friend, Steinólfr Arnórsson: 'You struck like a coward [. . .]. From this day I shall never be your wife.'⁵⁴ *Víga-Glúms saga* is strongly rooted in heroic conceptions of consent, but nevertheless marriage negotiations have been given a very important role as a decisive test of a man's social standing.

⁴⁹ Cf. Eyjólf's proposal to Ástriðr Vigfússdóttir (ch. 4) and how Víga-Glúmr helps Íngólfr in his proposal to Helga Þorkelsdóttir (chs 14–15).

⁵⁰ Vgs ch. 10, p. 35: 'Sá kostur þótti vera einnhverr beztr fyrir sakar frænda ok mest kunnustu ok framkvæmdar hennnar.'

⁵¹ Vgs ch. 10, p. 35: 'Ok nú er hans ráð enn virðuligra en áðr.'

⁵² Meulengracht Sørensen, *Fortælling*, pp. 275–76.

⁵³ Vgs ch. 16.

⁵⁴ Vgs ch. 21, p. 68: 'Hogg þú manna armastr; þetta eru ráð þér vitrari manna, en frá þessum degi skal ek aldri þín kona vera.'

Ljósvetninga saga

Ljósvetninga saga, like *Laxdæla saga* and *Gísla saga*, uses heroic poetry as a clear backdrop for its story. Perhaps the most exciting example of this is the saga's male and female flyting which plays on the rivalry between Brynhildr and Guðrún.⁵⁵ At a wedding, two magnates are present: Guðmundr Eyjólfsson is given the high seat, and Þórir Helgason is placed in the lower high seat. Their wives, Þórlaug and Geirlaug, begin to argue about who is the most highly regarded at the wedding and who should be sitting in the high seat. The dispute also touches on which of the women has the highest status. It all starts when a serving-woman offers Geirlaug the washbasin and hand towel first (getting to wash in clean, unused water and be the first to use the hand towel is a mark of status). As an ostensibly polite guest, Geirlaug directs the woman to Þórlaug. Þórlaug sends the woman back to Geirlaug; she is not one to be envious of such a thing, as if it were not already clear that someone other than Geirlaug is the most distinguished woman in the district? Through polite phrases that thinly disguise their enmity, the quarrel escalates:

Geirlaug mælti: 'Greiddr er beininn, Þórlaug. En hefir þú metnað til at vera mest metin; hefi ek engan hlut til jafns við þik nema gjaforð.' Þórlaug svarar: 'Víst hygg ek þik vel gefna. En nú er þar komit, at ek veit eigi aðra framar gipta en mik.' Geirlaug svarar: 'Þá værir þú vel gefin, ef þar væri einmælt um, at bóndi þinn væri vel hugaðr eða snjallr.' (Ljós ch. 5 (13), p. 18)

Geirlaug said: 'I have stated that you are the first, Þórlaug. But if you have the ambition to be the most honoured, then I can in no matter be your equal except in my marriage.' Þórlaug answers: 'I certainly consider you as being well married. But it has now come to this, that I know of no other who is better married than me.' Geirlaug answers: 'You would be well married if everyone said that your husband was properly able and brave.'

From the context, Geirlaug accuses Guðmundr of being passive in both the social and the sexual sense. Þórlaug, for her part, thinks Geirlaug is only making groundless accusations against her husband. Geirlaug retorts that everyone who can wag their tongue says the same. The episode illustrates how the saga uses traditional, heroic conceptions of marriage in leading up to the conflict in the saga. Women's

⁵⁵ In the heroic tradition, the quarrel is also over the right to bathe in the cleanest water; see Vls ch. 28 (30) and SnE, pp. 130–31. This episode was probably told also in the lost part of *Brót*. See also Theodore M. Andersson and William Ian Miller, *Law and Literature in Medieval Iceland: 'Ljósvetninga saga' and 'Valla-Ljóts saga'* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), p. 165 n. 75, and Meulengracht Sørensen, *Fortælling*, p. 227 n. 32. Jenny M. Jochens, *Old Norse Images of Women* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), pp. 167–71, makes an analysis of the different versions of the quarrel between Brynhildr and Guðrún. My study of *Ljósvetninga saga* does not include the *þættir* here, since these are regarded as interpolated at a later stage; see Jónas Kristjánsson, *Eddas*, pp. 241–42. The saga is usually dated to the middle of the thirteenth century; see Vésteinn Ólason, 'Íslendingasögur og þættir', in *Íslensk bókmenntasaga*, vol. II, ed. by Böðvar Guðmundsson and others (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 1993), pp. 25–163 (p. 107).

status is linked to the men they marry, and men must continually prove their honour and worthiness to the other characters and — not least — to their wives.

Thus, it is only logical that the saga later tells that the wife of the farmer Þórvarðr threatens to leave him if he does not help his son against his powerful enemies: 'I will not bring up another son for you, if you let this one die by the sword.'⁵⁶ That the wife is measured by her husband's deeds and honour and can leave him if she loses respect because of him is reminiscent of *Laxdæla saga*. On the other hand, the idea of a good marriage is not associated with the woman's consent to the wedding. In the only instance where a woman is asked for her opinion on a suitor by her *giptingar-maðr*, she remains strictly neutral.⁵⁷ In this saga, flirtation before the marriage is far less significant than rumours about who is a good match.

Bandamanna saga

Bandamanna saga tells a story that may shed light on how a father evaluates the suitors who ask for his daughters. The chieftain Gellir Þorkelsson is asked by Ófeigr Skíðason about who is the best match in Vestland, with regard to both women and men. Gellir names the sons and daughters of Snorri goði and Steinþórr of Eyri. Ófeigr wonders why Gellir does not name his own daughters; surely none are better or more beautiful than they? Gellir admits that his daughters have had many suitors, but 'no one has asked for them who was rich enough, well settled, with great kin, and with manly qualities. I am not rich myself, but still I am very careful to pick men for the sake of kin and honour.'⁵⁸

For Gellir, then, it is no simple business to arrange marriages for his daughters. He simply cannot afford to marry them off as well as he would like. An unspoken condition lies behind Gellir's refusals, a certain relationship between the man's wedding-gift and the woman's dowry. A rich suitor would bring a good deal of property and money to the negotiating table, which would require a good dowry from the bride's household in recompense. Ófeigr understands Gellir's situation. Since he needs Gellir's help in a rather difficult lawsuit, he proposes a marriage between his extremely rich son Oddr and Gellir's daughter Ragnheiðr. Oddr is not only rich, Ófeigr temptingly observes, but also of a good family and a promising young man.

Even if Gellir is already in a confederation with the magnates bringing the lawsuit against Oddr Ófeigsson, Gellir finds the offer altogether impossible to resist when

⁵⁶ Ljós ch. 14 (24), p. 76: 'En eigi skal ek þá annan ala son, ef þú selr þenna undir vápn.'

⁵⁷ Ljós ch. 5 (13), p. 17: 'En hon bað hann gera sem hann vildi.'

⁵⁸ Band ch. 9 (M), pp. 339–40: 'Því, at eigi hafa þeir til boðizk, at bæði sé stórauðgir ok hafi staðfestur góðar, kynríkir ok vel mannaðir sjáfir, en ek em þó ekki fērik, en þó mun ek mannvandr sakar kynferðis ok virðingar.' *Bandamanna saga* is usually dated to the 1270s or 1280s, or a little later; see Jónas Kristjánsson, *Eddas*, p. 232; Vésteinn Ólason, 'Íslendinga-sögur', pp. 121–22.

Ófeigr says that Oddr will pay Ragnheiðr's dowry himself. Ófeigr has found Gellir's weak spot; he has not succeeded in fulfilling the obligation he feels he has to be a good *giptingarmaðr* to his daughters. This becomes more important to him than loyalty to his confederates.

Again, the woman's own consent is pushed to the background, but Oddr's objectively good qualities together with his wealth mean the saga's audience would understand the marriage to be 'good'; all the criteria indicate that Gellir's daughter has found Mr Right. *Bandamanna saga* shows that in his heart of hearts, Gellir is an ideal *giptingarmaðr* because he puts his daughters' interests first and does not marry them off to just any man despite his own difficult position.

Eyrbyggja saga and Vatnsdæla saga

Eyrbyggja saga and *Vatnsdæla saga* deal with another important aspect of the sociology of arranged marriages, namely the premarital or extramarital lovers' tryst. In *Eyrbyggja saga* we read of the relationship Bjørn Breiðvíkingakappi has with Þuríðr Barkardóttir, half-sister of the powerful Snorri goði. Snorri grows tired of the gossip that Bjørn visits her more often than he should.⁵⁹ He marries Þuríðr off to the rich Þóroddr because he thinks she needs supervision. Snorri believes Þóroddr has enough wealth and powerful relatives to repel Bjørn's visits. However, Bjørn's visits do not cease after the wedding. Þóroddr is described as a dependable fellow, but not especially brave. He is unable in any case to stand up to Bjørn, but always gripes and complains about Bjørn's insults to his honour when Snorri goði comes to visit.

What both Snorri and Þóroddr should be more aware of is that Þuríðr *wants* Bjørn to visit her. She warns Bjørn many times of her brothers' plans to kill him. Bjørn's love is strong; after many disputes between them, Bjørn confesses to Snorri goði that he does not know if he will be able to stop trying to seduce Þuríðr as long as they live in the same district.⁶⁰ This episode shows Bjørn's visits to Þuríðr in a sympathetic light; the narrative structure of seduction takes on a new meaning as an expression of strong love-longing. This longing helps to justify Bjørn's actions in the saga. The description of Bjørn's relationship with Þuríðr resembles the variations on courtly love we encountered in the *riddarasögur*. Þuríðr's marriage is an empty shell for her. Her love for Bjørn was already alive and growing before her marriage to Þóroddr and has the character of a lifelong emotional bond.

Eyrbyggja saga is no courtly romance, however, and the affair is subordinate to other themes in the saga. Bjørn goes abroad, wins honour as a Jómsvíking and never

⁵⁹ Eyr ch. 29; cf. ch. 22.

⁶⁰ Eyr ch. 47. *Eyrbyggja saga* is usually dated to the third quarter of the thirteenth century; see discussion in Jónas Kristjánsson, *Eddas*, p. 264, and Vésteinn Ólason, 'Islendingasögur', p. 117.

returns to Iceland. However, many years later an Icelandic ship is stranded on an unknown shore and its crew encounters an old man who is respected by everyone in that place. The Icelanders are amazed when he speaks to them in their own language, and even more so when he asks about Þóroddr, Snorri goði, and Þuríðr Barkardóttir. The man asks the Icelanders to take a valuable ring back with them and give it to Þuríðr as a gift from one who was a better friend of hers than of her brother, the *goði* of Helgafell.⁶¹ Because of this most people back in Iceland believe the unknown man the sailors met must have been Björn breiðvíkingakappi.

A similar love affair is depicted in *Vatnsdæla saga*. The story is told of the chieftain Ingólfr Þorsteinsson, who persistently visits Valgerðr Óttarsdóttir. The depiction of Ingólfr's visits is particularly interesting because it creates deep conflicts in *Hallfreðar saga*. The two sagas both say that Óttarr becomes very angry at Ingólfr's visits to his daughter. A significant difference is that while Ingólfr is an aggressive man bent on dishonouring Óttarr in *Hallfreðar saga*, in *Vatnsdæla saga* Ingólfr insists that he cannot see anything improper about the visits. He is also obedient when Valgerðr's father forbids him to visit anymore, and instead expresses his love through *mansöngsvísur* to Valgerðr.⁶² The saga considers the verses far less dangerous for Óttarr's honour than Óttarr himself does. Óttarr's later attempt to kill Ingólfr is thus seen in a far more negative light than it is in *Hallfreðar saga*. The disparities can partly be put down to the saga authors, but can also be a sign that a love affair before marriage was regarded as less dangerous at the end of the thirteenth century than it had been a hundred years earlier.⁶³

Another characteristic that *Eyrbyggja saga* and *Vatnsdæla saga* share is the contrast between vindicated love affairs and seductions that are condemned. From the middle of the thirteenth century, the theme of the unwelcome suitor tends to go in one of two directions. The story tells either of a lover who is welcomed by the woman in a courtly context (like Björn or Ingólfr) or of a warlike berserk whom neither the family nor the woman wishes to have. Berserk suitors trust in their muscles, single combat, and fearlessness to win the best woman, but lack the social status and ability to win a woman over through the art of love.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Eyr ch. 64.

⁶² Vatn ch. 37.

⁶³ Bjarni Einarsson, *To skjaldesagaer: En analyse af Kormáks saga og Hallfreðar saga* (Bergen: Universitetsforlaget, 1976), p. 164; cf. Robert Cook, 'The Order of the Wooing Episodes in *Hallfreðar saga*', in *Úr Dölum til Dala: Guðbrandur Vigfússon Centenary Essays*, ed. by Rory McTurk and Andrew Wawn, Leeds Texts and Monographs, n.s., 11 (Leeds: University of Leeds, 1989), pp. 65–91 (pp. 74–83), on the relations between the two sagas concerning this episode. Cook argues that the version in *Möðruvallabók* of *Hallfreðar saga* has borrowed from *Vatnsdæla saga*.

⁶⁴ See Benjamin Blaney, 'The Berserk Suitor: The Literary Application of a Stereotyped Theme', *Scandinavian Studies*, 54 (1982), 279–94. He gives a literary analysis of the theme, as well as a useful list of sagas including it. An early example of this theme is found in *Egils*

In *Eyrbyggja saga*, the connection between berserk suitors and low social status is clear. Two Swedish berserks try to get their host in Iceland to give them valuable gifts in gratitude for all the help they have given him. The host retreats from his earlier promises and sends the berserks to his brother, Styrr Þorgrímsson. The older of the berserks falls in love with Styrr's proud daughter, Ásdís. He says that he does not want to dishonour Styrr by seducing (*fífla*) his daughter, but would like to have her as his wife. But, the berserk says, if he does not get Styrr's daughter it will help him little to complain if he talks to her often. Styrr promises him his daughter, if the two berserks manage to complete certain tasks first. Styrr sets them a superhuman amount of work to do. As they are toiling, Ásdís herself comes out to them. She has put on her best clothes, evidently to show the difference between herself and the two sweating berserks. She even refuses to answer when they speak to her, a sign of her disdain for the berserks. When they are finished, Styrr kills both by treachery. Neither Ásdís nor the saga express any regret over the killing. Instead, she is married to Snorri goði, a suitable match for both parties, according to the saga.⁶⁵

The berserks try to follow the social norms by proposing a formal courtship to a *giptingarmaðr*. But their reputation, poverty, and primitive knowledge and skills earn them a refusal from the woman herself and from her *giptingarmaðr*. Instead, they are used. It is also said in the saga that one will never find 'a woman of good family who wants to bind herself and her fate to a berserk'.⁶⁶ They are despised almost as trolls, and their courtship of a magnate's daughter poses a threat to the social strata.⁶⁷

Berserks and men outside of society have few opportunities to establish a good relationship with a woman. In *Grettis saga*, from the beginning of the fourteenth century, the contempt for berserk suitors is even clearer. Grettir offers to help a woman who does not want to marry a berserk. He challenges the berserk to single combat to release her from the threatened marriage. The berserk goes into a berserk rage and begins to bellow and bite his shield. All Grettir has to do is kick the shield and the berserk's jaw is broken.⁶⁸ Here the berserk has become a parody of the old-fashioned way to win a woman; such a display no longer impresses them. Björn

saga ch. 64. Still, this saga offers no critique of the notorious berserk as a representative of a social group; Egill is himself a warrior who occasionally becomes a berserk, or berserk-like; see Laurence de Looze, 'Poet, Poem and Poetic Process in *Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar*', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 104 (1989), 123–42 (pp. 123–25).

⁶⁵ Eyr chs 25–28.

⁶⁶ Eyr ch. 25, p. 63: 'Vermundr þóttisk eigi vita ván þeirar konu af góðum ættum, er sik myndi binda við berserk, né sín forlög.'

⁶⁷ The episode alludes to the mythological stories of the giants' desire for the goddesses, especially the master-builder tale in Snorri's *Edda*, when a giant nearly managed to win Freyja as a prize; see Joseph Harris, 'The Masterbuilder Tale in Snorri's *Edda* and Two Sagas', *Arkiv för Nordisk Filologi*, 91 (1976), 66–101.

⁶⁸ Grs ch. 40; cf. ch. 19.

breiðvíkingakappi and the berserks represent two distinct ways to approach a woman. From the mid-thirteenth century, it is clear that men who rely on the old warrior ideals are on the losing side.

Njáls saga

In *Laxdæla saga* the ideology of consent awaits the willingness of women to share society's norms. Attaching a right of veto to the woman's assessment of a potential marriage partner could be problematic if women did not act according to the same norms and values as those around them. This problem is addressed in *Njáls saga* and *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu*, both from the last decades of the thirteenth century. The two sagas present — and indirectly criticize — the consent ideology in *Laxdæla saga* in two different ways. We will look first at the portrayal of the unmarried woman's role in the arranging of a marriage in *Njáls saga*, focusing on the marriages of Hallgerðr Høskuldsdóttir.

Hallgerðr's role in the arrangement of her marriage corresponds in many ways with the pattern in *Laxdæla saga*. Hallgerðr marries four times in all, just as Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir does, and she is not one to work at a marriage to which she has not consented. Her first marriage is to Þorvaldr Ósvífrsson. He is described as a rich and powerful man, polite but rather impatient.⁶⁹ Høskuldr, Hallgerðr's father, warns Þorvaldr when the courtship begins that his daughter is rather wilful.⁷⁰ Despite the warnings Þorvaldr insists on Hallgerðr as his bride. Høskuldr is only too happy to get his daughter married off, and therefore does not ask his proud and headstrong daughter her opinion. Thus the marriage begins on the worst possible note: Hallgerðr is far from pleased with the betrothal agreement. The saga states that everyone noticed that she considered the match unworthy.⁷¹ The similarity to Guðrún's first marriage to the rich but 'not unafraid' Þorvaldr Halldórsson is clear. But Þorvaldr Ósvífrsson in *Njáls saga* is described much more favourably than Guðrún's first husband. It is also clear that Høskuldr and his closest friend and counsellor, Hrótr Herjólfsson, regard Þorvaldr as being the better half of the couple. On this occasion, therefore, it is certainly not evident that the woman's opinion represents the general opinion of a good match. And the marriage does end in tragedy. Þorvaldr gives Hallgerðr a hard blow to the face when she complains that he has stored up too little flour and dried fish for the winter — too little, that is, for her to live as splendidly as she wants to until spring. Her foster-father, Þjóstólfr, takes revenge for the blow by telling Þorvaldr how badly married his wife is. The conflict ends with Þjóstólfr killing Þorvaldr and Hallgerðr moving back to her father's house.

⁶⁹ Nj ch. 9, p. 30: 'Þorvaldr var vel styrkr maðr ok kurteiss, nokkut bráðr í skaplyndi.'

⁷⁰ Nj ch. 9, p. 31: 'dóttir mín er hørð í skapi'.

⁷¹ Nj ch. 10, p. 31: 'ok fannsk þat á öllu, at hon þóttisk vargefín'.

The second man who marries Høskuldr's daughter is Glúmr Óleifsson. Glúmr is a big, strong, handsome man who has been abroad for a long time. Now he wants to settle down in Iceland and get married. But his wife must be a woman who will raise his status.⁷² Of all the unmarried women in Borgarfjörður, he considers only Hallgerðr to be good enough. Høskuldr has his doubts about marrying his daughter off again, considering how it went the first time! However, Høskuldr's half-brother Hrútr offers some good advice. The marriage agreement must be free of deception, he says. This means that Høskuldr must tell all about Hallgerðr's character and her first marriage. Secondly, Hallgerðr's foster-father Þjóstólfr must not be allowed to live with them; he is a bad influence on Hallgerðr. Last but not least, Hallgerðr must be told all about the match; she must be allowed to see Glúmr and decide for herself whether she wants him or not.⁷³ Then she will not be able to blame anyone else if the marriage does not work out. Therefore, Glúmr must address himself directly to Hallgerðr to find out whether the match is as agreeable to her as it is to her relatives. Glúmr does as Hrútr recommends, and tells Hallgerðr that if she is not interested in the marriage, he will not mention it again. However, Hallgerðr considers Glúmr a better match than Þorvaldr was: 'However, it seems to me, Glúmr, that I believe I will come to love you if we can get along.'⁷⁴

Again, the similarity to Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir's second marriage to Þórðr Ingunnarson is clear. But there are differences as well: Hallgerðr's past haunts her in the person of her foster-father Þjóstólfr. Despite Hrútr's warnings he continues to live with Hallgerðr and Glúmr. After a short time, relations between Þjóstólfr and Glúmr become strained. It ends with Hallgerðr's foster-father killing her second husband as well, this time against Hallgerðr's will. Hallgerðr's second marriage is the closest she comes to domestic happiness. The marriage of Hallgerðr and Glúmr is described as *jafnræði*; their personalities are compatible and Hallgerðr is loyal to her husband to the last, even if he does slap her once. In this relationship the woman's consent has a positive function; it is one of a series of steps in contracting a marriage. Consent still has a heroic visage: Hallgerðr's abiding love is emphasized as meaningful for the character of their relationship, but at the same time love and consent before the wedding are decisive: they mean that Hallgerðr cannot later 'blame anyone else if the marriage does not work out'.

Up to this point in the saga there are many similarities to the consent ideology in *Laxdæla saga*. From Hallgerðr's third marriage, *Njáls saga* diverges distinctly. This

⁷² Nj ch. 13, p. 41: 'ef ek gæta vel fyrir mér sét'.

⁷³ Nj ch. 13, p. 43: 'Skal nú ok eigi svá fara sem fyrr, at Hallgerðr sé leynd; skal hon nú vita allan þenna kaupmála ok sjá Glúm ok ráða sjálf, hvárt hún vill eiga hann eða eigi, ok megi hon eigi öðrum kenna, þó at eigi verði vel; skal þetta allt velalaust vera.'

⁷⁴ Nj ch. 13, p. 44: 'Veit ek, at þit eruð mikils háttar menn, bræðr, ok veit ek, at ek mun nú miklu betr gefin en fyrr; en vita vil ek, hvat þér hafið um talat eða hvé mjök þér hafið fram mælt málinu. En svá lízk mér á þik, at ek mun þér vel unnandi verða, ef vit komum skapi saman.'

third marriage is to Gunnarr Hámundarson of Hlíðarendi. Gunnarr is given a description in *Njáls saga* that is only equalled in the sagas of Icelanders by *Laxdæla saga*'s portrayal of Kjartan Ólafsson. Gunnarr is strong, handsome, a good sportsman, polite, rich, generous, and friendly. People say that no one can compare with him.⁷⁵ Thus, in contrast to Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir, Hallgerðr gets the best man in her third marriage. Gunnarr and Hallgerðr meet for the first time at the Althing and have a long and agreeable conversation.⁷⁶ There is no doubt that their looks seem to complement one another; Hallgerðr is the most beautifully dressed of all the women there, while Gunnarr is wearing the fine clothing King Haraldr Gormsson had given him. Gunnarr asks why such a beautiful and proud woman is not yet married. She replies that not many would venture to propose marriage to her; she is said to be dangerous! But Gunnarr does not give up; he asks Hǫskuldr for her hand. Hallgerðr says nothing against the match and speaks for herself at the betrothal.

But the tragedy in this part of *Njáls saga* originates in this very marriage. Gunnarr's friendship with Njáll is constantly put to the test because Hallgerðr falls out with Bergþóra Skarphedinsdóttir, Njáll's wife. Hallgerðr insults Gunnarr's friends and challenges chieftains on Gunnarr's behalf. The conflicts culminate in the scene where Hallgerðr refuses Gunnarr a lock of her hair to replace his broken bowstring in the final battle. How can this state of affairs be explained in the light of the ideology of marriage we have encountered in the other sagas of Icelanders?

Attempts have often been made to justify Hallgerðr's behaviour to Gunnarr. Gunnarr does not live up to her expectations, so Hallgerðr has the right to give him up. This interpretation would correspond well with the picture we have of the woman's role in *Laxdæla saga*.⁷⁷

But in *Njáls saga*, Hallgerðr's role is much more ambiguous. The saga author clearly wants to portray Hallgerðr's character and actions as questionable. Doubt is cast on Hallgerðr's powers of judgement, and her loyalty to the destructive Þjóstólfr is a hint in the same line as the reference to her 'thief's eyes'. For this reason we are not all that surprised when her will goes against society's idea of a good match for her. Part of this conflict has to do with the clash of two different value systems. When Gunnarr makes it a priority to preserve his friendship and seek peaceful solutions to conflicts, the saga supports him; but Hallgerðr believes extravagance, challenges of honour, and quick revenge function better. From a heroic discourse, Hallgerðr's repudiation of Gunnarr is justified, but it is clearly dangerous in the transition from one set of norms for male behaviour to another. Hallgerðr's consent is now used against her; after all, she approved of Gunnarr after the conversation at the Althing and gave her consent in the betrothal negotiations. In this instance, the

⁷⁵ Nj ch. 19.

⁷⁶ Nj ch. 33.

⁷⁷ See Hans E. Kinck, *Sagaenes ånd og skikkelser* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1951), pp. 31–41; Marina Mundt, 'Kvinnens forhold til ekteskapet i *Njáls saga*', *Edda*, 76 (1976), 17–25 (p. 22).

woman's acknowledgement does not lead automatically to a good marriage. Hallgerðr's actions thus call into question the theory that a woman's consent at the beginning of the marriage leads to *lasting* consent. A woman can change her mind even if all the world thinks her husband is good enough for her.

The saga, however, implies that it is Hallgerðr who is unworthy of Gunnarr. Hrútr, who serves as a sort of marriage counsellor in both *Njáls saga* and *Laxdæla saga*, believes that it is not an equal match. He warns Gunnarr about her 'mixed' nature.⁷⁸ A contrast to this uneven marriage is created by the marriage of Þráinn Sigfússon and Hallgerðr's daughter by Glúmr, Þorgerðr. The two meet *and* are married at Gunnarr's and Hallgerðr's wedding. This hasty decision is seen in a positive light because Hrútr, the matrimonial expert, considers the couple to be *jafnræði*. Þorgerðr Glúmsdóttir goes to live with her new husband and becomes a good wife.⁷⁹ The ideal of equality is clearly present in the saga, but according to the saga, unmarried women are less competent judges of potential husbands than Hrútr is.

Hallgerðr is put in a situation not unlike that of the giantess Gerðr when she refuses Freyr in *Skírnismál*. Her foster-father Þjóstólfr, who defends her in her first marriage and ruins her second, has a name that may be derived from that of a giant. Moreover, Hallgerðr's maternal uncle has troll-like characteristics due to his use of magic. Towards the end of the saga, after Hallgerðr has refused the hero Gunnarr (just as Gerðr did to Freyr), she returns to relationships with men connected to the underworld. Her last relationship is with the troublemaker Hrappr, Gunnarr's complete opposite. The name Hrappr may be an allusion to the verb 'to rape', and he has also shown his interest in exploiting women's sexuality earlier in the saga.⁸⁰ That Hallgerðr rejects the good Gunnarr in favour of a life with Hrappr indicates that she is unable to place herself within the social space of the saga. The last time we hear of Hallgerðr she is described as a 'hornkerling eða púta'.⁸¹ Hallgerðr thus ends up in the condition Gerðr is threatened with: both denied sexual and emotional satisfaction from a man and ending up among perverse creatures.

⁷⁸ Nj ch. 33, p. 86: 'Ekki þykki mér þetta jafnræði [. . .] þú ert maðr vaskr ok vel at þér, en hon er blandin mjök.'

⁷⁹ Nj ch. 34.

⁸⁰ Ursula Dronke, *The Role of Sexual Themes in Njáls Saga*, The Dorothea Coke Memorial Lecture (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1981), pp. 28–29; Silje Beite Løken, 'Hornkerling eða púta eller skörungur mikill ok drengur góðr: En undersøkelse av kvinneskikkelser og overgangssituasjoner i tre islandske ættesagaer, Brennu-Njáls saga, Laxdæla saga og Gísla saga Súrssonar' (unpublished master's thesis, University of Oslo, 1999), pp. 69–82.

⁸¹ Nj ch. 91. 'Púta' is the normal designation of prostitutes in Norwegian sources. 'Hornkerling' might be taken to refer to a free woman who has not been bought with 'mundr', but who has a long-term sexual relationship with a man; cf. the term 'hornungur' in G 104 and F X 47. This is exactly the designation Hallgerðr wants to avoid at the beginning of her marriage with Gunnarr, when she is expelled from the high seat by Bergþóra: 'því at engi hornkerling vil ek vera' (Nj ch. 35, p. 91).

Hallgerðr shares this fate with the other female main character in the first part of the saga, Unnr Marðardóttir. Unnr is originally married to Hrútr, but divorces him because Hrútr is unable to consummate sexual intercourse with her. After her father's death she inherits great wealth, but as a single woman she fritters it all away. Gunnarr Hámundarson is related to Unnr and helps her get her dowry back from Hrútr. After she obtains her freedom, she is courted by one of the villains of the saga, Valgarðr inn grái (the grey). She marries him without asking the advice of her kinsmen, and Gunnarr and Njáll are greatly displeased.⁸² The couple's son, Mǫrðr Valgarðsson, is a force for evil from infancy onward, and the rest of *Njáls saga* is punctuated by his intrigues; he is a sort of Loki figure who is both a kinsman and an opponent of the main characters.⁸³ This son's lack of good qualities is a sign that Unnr herself has taken a step down in society's view: she has married a man who is a wretch(?) and maleficent. In the mythological poems, the giants' connection with the *ásynjur* or goddesses is an anomaly that produces social disorder. It is tempting to conclude that the author of *Njáls saga* played on these old myths in his depiction of the marriages.

In the later part of the saga, the social balance is threatened by another proud woman's demands on her husband. This time it is the marriage of Hildigunnr Starkaðardóttir and Njáll's foster-son Hǫskuldr that makes the waves. Flosi, Hildigunnr's uncle and *giptingarmaðr*, reacts positively to the courtship, but Flosi wants nothing to do with a marriage against his niece's will. Hildigunnr considers Hǫskuldr good enough in many ways, but she does not want a husband who is not a *goði*. Hildigunnr's demand is more problematic to fulfill in Iceland than in Norway; there is no king who can give a man an earldom when he pleases. Njáll, man of peace that he is, finds another solution: he creates a new *goðorð* for Hǫskuldr. But Hǫskuldr's new position also lays the foundation for strife between him and Njáll's sons, a conflict that ends in Hǫskuldr's death. Again, a woman's judgement is more problematic than in earlier sagas.

After many conflicts, *Njáls saga* ends with an ideal marriage. The lucky pair are Kári Sǫlmundarson, the closest man to avenge Njáll and his family, and Hildigunnr, who is indirectly behind Hǫskuldr's death and incites her uncle Flosi to carry out the burning of Njáll.⁸⁴ This marriage builds a bridge over earlier conflicts and symbolizes a restored balance in society. This is a marriage in which neither Kári's nor Hildigunnr's opinions of each other are stated; they are married first and foremost for the good of society.

Njáls saga thus emphasizes the role of the *giptingarmaðr* more than *Laxdæla saga* does. The best matches and marriages are those Njáll plans for his sons.⁸⁵ He and Hrútr are the men who know best what couples are compatible. God even

⁸² Nj ch. 25.

⁸³ See Lars Lönnroth, *Njáls saga: A Critical Introduction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), pp. 63, 76–77.

⁸⁴ Nj ch. 159.

⁸⁵ Nj chs 25–27.

appears as a *giptingarmaðr* in the saga; Kolskeggr Hámundarson dreams that a man with a radiant appearance comes to him and commands him to become his knight. In return, he promises him a good marriage.⁸⁶ The well-arranged marriage is not seen as endangering the individual's autonomy in the saga. The ideal is perhaps best expressed through what Njáll's wife Bergþóra says about her marriage: 'I was young when given to Njáll; and I promised him that we would share the same fate.'⁸⁷ It is this very ideal that Hallgerðr Høskuldsdóttir shatters.

The author who created *Njáls saga* was to all appearances familiar with the canonical laws regarding consent and marriage.⁸⁸ Women's consent was a reality *giptingarmenn* had to learn to live with. The saga author, however, is sceptical about giving too much power to the women themselves; it is the judgement of wise and responsible *giptingarmenn* that is idealized.

Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu

Gunnlaugs saga is traditionally considered more 'romantic' than the other sagas of Icelanders. The reason for this is, of course, the lifelong love of Helga Þorsteinsdóttir

⁸⁶ Nj ch. 81.

⁸⁷ Nj ch. 129, p. 330: 'Ek var ung gefin Njáli, ok hefi ek því heitit honum, at eitt skyldi ganga yfir okkr bæði.'

⁸⁸ See Lönnroth, *Njáls saga*, pp. 104–64, on the author's 'clerical mind' on other issues. In the marriage between Hrútr and Unnr, the cause of the divorce was that Hrútr was unable to consummate intercourse with Unnr. According to several canonists, this could be a valid reason for the annulment of a marriage; see James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 376–77; Christopher N. L. Brooke, *The Medieval Idea of Marriage* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), pp. 129–33. Usually such cases concerned impotence, but might have included Hrútr's problem (his penis is too large): Nj ch. 6. An even clearer case that shows knowledge of canon law is the story of Hrappr Örgumleiðason's visit in Norway. While visiting the magnate Guðbrandr at Dølum, rumours circulate that Hrappr has tried to seduce his host's daughter. Guðbrandr tries to keep his daughter away from Hrappr, but she soon runs away with Hrappr into the forest and becomes pregnant with his child. Guðbrandr and his sons try to kill Hrappr, but Hrappr jokingly says that he does not want to kill his family. Hrappr here alludes to the fact that through his intercourse with the daughter he considered himself married to her: Nj chs 87–88. The episode concerns a secret marriage, something that was quite usual in this period; see Michael M. Sheehan, 'Choice of Marriage Partner in the Middle Ages: Development and Mode of Application of a Theory of Marriage', *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History*, 1 (1978), 1–33. This also explains why Hrappr never marries Hallgerðr when he goes back to Iceland; he is already married in Norway. It is also noteworthy that while Hrappr is on the run from Guðbrandr, a couple that lives in the forest helps him. This couple is not explicitly said to be married, but the woman is called *húsfreyja* and they live as a wedded couple. Although this couple is depicted in a more favourable way, the saga still excludes secretly married couples from society.

and Gunnlaugr ormstunga. Of all the sagas of Icelanders, it is perhaps this one that has had the most appeal for a modern audience. The characters' actions are motivated by love, but like so many other classic love stories, it ends with the death of the lovers. What connection is there in this saga between choices based on society's norms or the heart's desires?

The saga begins and ends with Helga Þorsteinsdóttir. Her father wants to abandon his baby daughter to die; he has had a dream that the child will cause the death of good men. Helga is found, however, and grows up to be the most beautiful woman in Iceland. Her hair is as lovely as gold, and she is considered the best match in the whole area around Borgarfjörðr.⁸⁹ She soon has a suitor in the skald Gunnlaugr Illugason. Gunnlaugr's character is ambiguous; he is seen as a troublemaker because of his temperament and sharp tongue. He is certainly not chieftain material; it is Gunnlaugr's brother who has those qualities, the saga tells us. Gunnlaugr's rival Hrafn Önundarson is described more concisely, but to make up for this the saga places him among the best of men. All his brothers are *efnlígir menn*, but Hrafn is the foremost of them in every way. Hrafn is portrayed as a much more sympathetic and calmer person than the problematic Gunnlaugr.

When Gunnlaugr wants to become betrothed to Helga, the public evaluation of his standing comes out. Helga's father Þorsteinn refuses to accept a marriage between Gunnlaugr and Helga because Gunnlaugr has little he can call his own. It is not a *jafnræði* match, he concludes.⁹⁰ Gunnlaugr is offended; what man does Þorsteinn imagine is better for Helga than he is? Þorsteinn can name quite a few, including Hrafn and his brothers. Gunnlaugr begins a comparison, not between himself and his rivals directly, but between their fathers. His father, Illugi inn svarti, is a much better man than the other men's fathers, he asserts. Þorsteinn has to agree with that. To Illugi he also says that if Gunnlaugr were like his father, he would have no objection to the marriage. But Illugi sees the refusal as devaluing his whole household. The friendship between Þorsteinn and him is over and his sons are considered equal to Þorsteinn and his children.⁹¹ Not on her own initiative, but on her father's approval, Helga finally becomes engaged to Gunnlaugr. No one else may have her for three years, but there will be no formal betrothal until Gunnlaugr returns from his journey abroad. Gunnlaugr stays away longer than this, and Þorsteinn gives Helga to Hrafn instead. When Gunnlaugr finally returns, his companion, Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld, tells him that many considered that this betrothal was *jafnræði* in Iceland. Public opinion supports Hrafn, not Gunnlaugr.⁹²

⁸⁹ Gnl ch. 4.

⁹⁰ Gnl ch. 5, p. 66: 'Er þat ekki jafnræði með ykk Helgu, meðan þú ert svá óráðinn, ok mun því ekki verða á litit.'

⁹¹ Gnl ch. 5, p. 67: 'ef þú synjar okkr feðgum jafnræðis'.

⁹² Gnl ch. 10, p. 84: 'margir menn mæltu þat, at Hrafn væri eigi óröskvari en Gunnlaugr'. See also Meulengracht Sørensen, *Fortælling*, p. 281; Laurence de Looze, 'Poet, Poem and

But Helga loves Gunnlaugr; she would rather have him than Hrafn. *Gunnlaugs saga* thus has certain 'romantic' qualities that distinguish it from *Laxdæla saga* and *Njáls saga*. The basis of the conflict between the rivals Hrafn and Gunnlaugr is built up in the same way as that of Bolli and Kjartan. The main difference is that she holds fast to her true love but does not want to see her husband dead. For Gunnlaugr, life is not worth living if he does not get Helga. They belong together. Accordingly, he builds his life around Helga and does not manage to establish himself in society before he settles matters with Hrafn. For her part, Helga never supports her husband in his fight against her one-time beloved, as other saga heroines often do (Steingerðr in *Kormáks saga*, Kolfinna in *Hallfreðar saga*, Guðrún in *Laxdæla saga*, and Oddný eykyndill in *Bjarnar saga Hítðælakappi*). The night Gunnlaugr comes back to Iceland, Hrafn dreams that he is lying bathed in blood in his marital bed. Helga does end matrimonial life with Hrafn when she hears of Gunnlaugr's return; she refuses to share a bed with her husband any more. Helga loves Gunnlaugr in spite of the fact that most people think Hrafn is the better man. If the woman's choice does not agree with the general assessment, the saga shows that her will is a factor to be reckoned with.

Despite Gunnlaugr's many faults, Helga's love makes him a hero. In the single combat between Hrafn and Gunnlaugr, Hrafn is fatally wounded. He asks for a little water, and Gunnlaugr brings him a drink in his helmet. But Hrafn betrays Gunnlaugr; as he is lying on the ground, he deals Gunnlaugr a blow to the head. He explains his dishonourable deed in these words: 'I could not do anything else; I did not want you to have the embraces of Helga the beautiful.'⁹³ Hrafn's death is shameful, while Gunnlaugr wins an honourable end through his fight for Helga, an honour he never attained in life.

This skald's saga is almost free of insulting *nið* verse, even if Gunnlaugr and his nature indicate that he was traditionally associated with the skald's role of challenging other men's honour.⁹⁴ Traditional honour is still present as an important guideline for characters' actions. Þorsteinn's dream about the two eagles who kill each other for the sake of the swan may also reflect that tradition tended to make more of the conflict between rivals than of the love story itself. But as the saga was written at the end of the thirteenth century, the characters' actions are motivated by love and not by a quest for honour in which women are the means rather than the end.⁹⁵

Poetic Process in *Bjarnarsaga Hítðælakappa* and *Gunnlaugssaga Ormstungu*', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 85 (1986), 479–93 (pp. 487–93).

⁹³ Gnl ch. 12, p. 102: 'en þat gekk mér til þess, ek ann þér eigi faðmlagsins Helgu innar fǫgru'.

⁹⁴ De Looze, 'Bjarnarsaga Hítðælakappa and Gunnlaugssaga Ormstungu'; Alison Finlay, 'Egils saga and Other Poet's Sagas', in *Introductory Essays on Egils saga and Njáls saga*, ed. by John Hines and Desmond Slay (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1992), pp. 33–48.

⁹⁵ However, see Meulengracht Sørensen, *Fortælling*, pp. 288–90. He argues that love does not win over honour as an ideal in this saga; at most it sides with it. *Bjarnar saga Hítðæla-*

Summary

Looking at these sagas leads me to three conclusions. First, the ideology of consent in *Laxdæla saga* stands out from rest of the sagas of Icelanders written in the thirteenth century. Women's consent is present in other sagas as well, but seldom do we find the direct linkage between women's consent before a marriage is contracted and a good, equal marriage.

The second conclusion is that contracting a marriage had great significance for a young man in establishing his social status. The pursuit of a bride who would give status to her husband had become very important in the sagas of Icelanders. The process preceding the betrothal and wedding is given a more significant place in the story.

The third conclusion is that the great importance of marriage for alliances and social reproduction made it problematic to link a marriage arrangement to the woman's consent alone. This is why women's powers of judgement are questioned in *Njáls saga*. *Gunnlaugs saga* gives a more 'romantic' criticism of the ideology by stressing that love does not always correspond to society's view of an equal match. Nevertheless, traces of the consent ideology of *Laxdæla saga* remain as an underlying assumption in presenting the problem in these two sagas. Some way or other, the woman's consent must be part of the process in contracting a marriage, but how and to what degree? A solution to this problem is to be found in the sagas of the late Middle Ages. Before we turn our attention to these sagas, let us examine the role of women in betrothal and marriage as it is portrayed in the thirteenth-century contemporary sagas.

kappa is perhaps the closest saga in theme to *Gunnlaugs saga*. In both these sagas the rivals of the hero, Þórðr and Hrafn respectively, are valued as equal matches to the women, even though the women themselves, Oddný and Helga, desire the protagonist more than the 'sensible' match. This 'antisocial' love leads to misery not so much for society as for the main characters themselves. However, *Bjarnar saga* is not as concerned with the relationship between the lovers as *Gunnlaugs saga* is. Bjarni Guðnason, 'Aldur og einkenni *Bjarnarsögu Hítðelakappa*', in *Sagnaþing helgað Jónasi Kristjánssyni sjötugum, 10. Apríl 1994*, ed. by Gisli Sigurðsson, Guðrún Kvaran, and Sigurgeir Steingrímsson (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1994), pp. 69–85, has argued that *Bjarnar saga* was written after *Gunnlaugs saga*, and not in the early thirteenth century as has traditionally been assumed; see also Jónas Kristjánsson, *Eddas*, p. 256. De Looze, 'Bjarnarsaga Hítðelakappa and Gunnlaugssaga Ormstungu', has, however, pointed out several distinctions between the two sagas, especially concerning the attitude to *nið* and honour. A saga that is clearly inspired by *Gunnlaugs saga* is *Þorsteins saga hvíta*. Þorsteinn 'the fair' is, however, from the outset an equal match for Helga in the opinion of the people, while he himself is so modest that he considers Helga too good for himself; see Þshv ch. 4. But in the end he manages to kill his rival and marry his beloved, an extraordinarily happy ending in this narrative structure of love.

Contracting Marriages in Íslendinga saga

The main source for marriages up to the last quarter of the thirteenth century is the compound *Sturlunga saga*. In a far different way to the sagas of Icelanders, these sagas are bound by the events that actually took place in the lifetime of the author and audience. But the sagas are also coloured by political sympathies, literary parameters as to what was *sögulegt*, ‘saga-worthy’, and more unconscious mentalities.⁹⁶ It is the contemporary sagas as products of their period we will look at here, with particular attention given to Sturla Þórðarson’s *Íslendinga saga*. His saga covers events in the period 1183–1258 and was probably written in the early 1280s. As in the other contemporary sagas, we only get a brief glimpse of some of the details of how marriages were contracted and the relationship between husbands and wives, usually when it is significant to the political situation in Iceland.⁹⁷

However, it is good to remember that Sturla Þórðarson was well acquainted with the doctrine of consent. Through his stay in Norway and his work on *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, he showed how women’s consent could be used as a political weapon. Both he and his half-brother Óláfr hvítaskáld have been suggested as the author of *Laxdæla saga*. In any case, Sturla shows he has a good understanding of the doctrine in this saga through the development of his version of *Landnámabók*. He also served as law-speaker in the period 1272–82, which was the same period in which Bishop Árni introduced his new Christian law (1275) and *Jónsbók* was adopted at the Althing (1281). Did Sturla emphasize the importance of the woman’s opinion of her suitor before the wedding or during the marriage? Can we trace Sturla’s attitudes to what made a marriage good or bad?

In particular, the marriages arranged for Sturla’s closest relatives can give us an idea of the significance he placed on consent and marriage within the Icelandic aristocracy. What is special about *Íslendinga saga*, after all, is that Sturla makes himself and his closest family members characters in the saga. We will start with how Sturla depicts his uncle Snorri Sturluson’s attempt to create a strong financial and political foundation through his marriage strategies.

Sturla Þórðarson must have expressly chosen to describe his uncle’s marriage strategies. Snorri’s fortune grew considerably in a few years through his marriage to Herdís Bersadóttir and later when he entered into *félag* (community of property) with the extremely rich Hallveig Ormsdóttir. In introducing the arrangement with Hallveig, Sturla has a great deal he wishes to tell. Hallveig was the richest woman in Iceland at the beginning of the 1220s. However, in the autumn of 1222 Snorri had a

⁹⁶ Guðrún Nordal, *Ethics and Action in Thirteenth-Century Iceland*, The Viking Collection, 11 (Odense: Odense University Press, 1998), pp. 11–28.

⁹⁷ Cf. Auður Magnúsdóttir, *Frillor och fruar: Politik och samlevnad på Island, 1120–1400*, Avhandlingar från Historiska Institutionen i Göteborg, 29 (Gothenburg: Historiska institutionen, University of Gothenburg, 2001), pp. 43–45; Úlfar Bragason, “‘Hart er í heimi, hórdomr mikill’: Lesiði Sturlungu’, *Skírnir*, 163 (1989), 54–71 (p. 57).

different woman in his sights: Sólveig Sæmundardóttir of the Oddaverja family.⁹⁸ When her father died that autumn, it was found that he had willed her an equal inheritance with her brothers.⁹⁹ Snorri Sturluson was allotted the task of moving the property and accordingly set off for the south. He spent the night at Keldur farm, where Sólveig lived with her mother at the time. Sturla notes that relations between them were good and Snorri enjoyed talking to her.¹⁰⁰

Sólveig returns with Snorri to Oddi. On the way they meet the rich Hallveig Ormsdóttir, but Snorri finds her behaviour inappropriate for a rich woman and laughs at her.¹⁰¹ Through this episode Sturla Þórðarson contrasts Sólveig's qualities with those of Hallveig.

There is much to indicate that it was Sólveig whom Snorri really wanted to have.¹⁰² But before Snorri knows what is going on, his own nephew Sturla Sighvatsson woos and wins Sólveig. Nothing more is said about her opinion in the matter, but she does not oppose the marriage either. Snorri 'became very upset when he heard about Sturla's marriage, and men thought that he had planned this otherwise'.¹⁰³ Shortly afterward, he let Hallveig move in with him. The financial advantages he sought in the alliance with Sólveig were lost, and the arrangement he entered into with Hallveig brought him, according to Sturla Þórðarson, little honour.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁸ Herdís, Snorri's first wife, disappears from the saga after Snorri moved to Reykjaholt in 1202. Herdís lived until 1233, but we know nothing of the last years of her life. Snorri, however, had several children with other women than Herdís in these years; cf. Sts, I, 242. It is perhaps noteworthy that the father of Herdís died in 1202; that could have made it easier for Snorri to behave as he pleased while still keeping her property.

⁹⁹ Grágás ruled that daughters should have less inheritance than sons. Agnes S. Arnórsdóttir points out that Sólveig's father wanted her to have the same chance of attaining high social status as her brothers; see Agnes S. Arnórsdóttir, *Konur og vígamenn: Staða kynjanna á Íslandi á 12. og 13. öld*, Sagnfræðirannsóknir, 12 (Reykjavík: Sagnfræðistofnun, Háskóla Íslands, 1995). The fact that both Snorri Sturluson and Sturla Sighvatsson sought her hand indicates that this strategy was successful.

¹⁰⁰ Sts, I, 299: 'Var hann þar í kærleikum miklum við þær mæðgur, ok fór Solveig í Odda með honum. Þótti Snorra allskemmtilig at tala við hana.'

¹⁰¹ Sts, I, 299: 'En er þau riðu frá Keldum, reið kona á mót þeim ok hafði flakólpu bláa ok saumuð flökin at höfði henni. Hafði hon þat fyrir hattinn. Einn maðr var með henni. En þat var Hallveig Ormsdóttir, er þá var færikust á Íslandi. Snorra þótti hennar ferð heldr hæðilig ok brosti at.'

¹⁰² See Guðrún Nordal, *Ethics and Action*, pp. 89–90.

¹⁰³ Sts, I, 300: 'Fár varð Snorri um, er hann frétti kvánfang Sturlu, ok þótti mönnum sem hann hefði til annars ætlat.'

¹⁰⁴ There was great enmity between Sturla Sighvatsson and Snorri in the succeeding years. Sturla Þórðarson tells that Snorri and his companions used to call Sturla Sighvatsson 'Dala-Freyr'; see Sts, I, 326, 327, 353. Snorri had himself, in the *Edda*, interpreted Freyr's proposal to Gerðr as a story of a man who sacrificed his prime weapon, his sword, to get his beloved,

Íslendinga saga is critical of many of Snorri's actions.¹⁰⁵ This is true not least of his fully conscious exploitation of his children's marriage potential. Snorri was careful to marry off his sons in such a way that the property was not divided too much. His daughters were married off to powerful men for political reasons. But, as we saw previously, these alliances by marriage were brittle. According to Sturla Þórðarson, the fact that Snorri marries off his daughters without regard for whether they are compatible with their husbands is a problem. In his portrayal of the divorce of Gizurr Þorvaldsson and Ingibjörg Snorradóttir, Sturla Þórðarson consciously uses the concept of the need for a woman's abiding consent. After Gizurr and Ingibjörg's son dies, Sturla Þórðarson writes that their life together became difficult because of their *ósamþykki* ('discord'). To contribute to increased *samþykki* ('concord; consent') between Gizurr and Ingibjörg, their parents try to pump more wealth into the marriage. It helps but little, and shortly afterward they separate.¹⁰⁶ Snorri's daughters do not have happy lives with their husbands, a fact which leads to serious consequences.

Sturla's attitude to Snorri's marriage strategies fits well with a Christian understanding of consent. The woman's consent at the beginning of the marriage gave a more lasting bond and functioned better in the creation of alliances in Icelandic society. At the same time, Sturla has kept much of the traditional, heroic understanding of consent; women who are not asked for their opinion are not condemned if they are less than loyal to their husbands. Indeed, in his depiction of a similar conflict between father-in-law and son-in-law in *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* (Earl Skúli/King Hákon), Sturla was careful to mention that Margrét Skúladóttir had consented to the betrothal to Hákon Hákonarson. This laid the foundation for her loyalty to her husband.

The picture Sturla gives of the marriages of his father, Þórðr Sturluson, and his uncle, Sigvatr Sturluson, is less crass. Sturla relates that in his first marriage, Þórðr 'was not fortunate enough to develop such love for Helga as was seemly, and it eventually came to a divorce'.¹⁰⁷ He then married a woman he could live with and who brought great wealth into the marriage. In Sturla's eyes, the lack of love justi-

something that he was to regret at Ragnarøk; see Guðrún Nordal, *Ethics and Action*, pp. 178–79, 91–98.

¹⁰⁵ Egill Skallagrímsson showed himself in a dream to one of Snorri's followers and reproached Snorri's acts of greed; see Sts, I, 248. Guðrún Nordal, 'Sturlunga saga and the Context of Saga-Writing', in *Introductory Essays on Egils saga and Njáls saga*, ed. by Hines and Slay, pp. 1–14 (pp. 3–4), comments on the importance of this dream in Sturla Þórðarson's portrayal of Snorri: 'Sturla Þórðarson's portrayal of Snorri Sturluson in *Íslendinga saga* has this dream at its roots. Snorri is criticised not only for want of bravery, but also for a greed and an avarice which were seen as flaws of character responsible for Snorri's failure in human relationships, particularly with his kinsmen.'

¹⁰⁶ Sts, I, 346.

¹⁰⁷ Sts, I, 231: 'Þórðr bar eigi auðnu til at fella þvílíka ást til Helgu, sem vera átti, ok kom því svá, at skilnaðr þeirra var gerr'.

fied the divorce. He is more ambiguous about his father's second marriage; it seems to have been for money that he remarried. But the good match he made elevated Þórðr to a chieftaincy; he found a woman he was proud to be *jafnræði* with.

Snorri's and Þórðr's brother Sigvatr did not gain much materially from his one marriage.¹⁰⁸ He courted Halldóra Tumadóttir but had to undergo a critical evaluation by her family. Halldóra's mother loved her so much that she only wanted to marry her off to a man whom all her kinsmen would consider completely *jafnræði*. In this case the marriage was emphasized as being good.¹⁰⁹ For Halldóra's sister, their mother had quite a different aim: she wanted to marry her off to the first suitor whose qualifications for the match were within the bounds of propriety.¹¹⁰ The demands placed upon Halldóra's suitor must have given a palpable boost to Sigvatr's cultural capital, in contrast to how Ingimundr Grímsson managed to marry the younger sister. We only know Ingimundr from the genealogies; he never became a key player in Icelandic politics.

Through the accounts of his father's and uncle's marriages, Sturla shows that there had to be love between husbands and wives. But he does not do much to link this to the woman's consent to the marriage. In this he shows that he follows a more traditional and less individualistic view of love. When Sturla Þórðarson agrees to a courtship on behalf of his thirteen-year-old daughter Ingibjörg in 1253, no special emphasis is placed on her consent. No secret is made of the fact that the most important reason for the marriage is the alliance between the parents, Sturla Þórðarson and Earl Gizurr Þorvaldsson. Ingibjörg's consent is not insisted upon by her father; the role Sturla wants to play is that of the wise head of household who arranges his daughter's marriage in society's best interests. He contrasts his own altruistic marriage strategies with Snorri's egotistical ones. The traditional conception of consent was more alive for Sturla Þórðarson than the Church's new teaching. The new ideals we can trace in his daughter's wedding are, as in *Hákonar saga*, connected first and foremost with pageantry, not with chivalry or the romantic bond of love.

But Sturla also tells of Ingimundr Jónsson's failed courtship of the widow Jóriðr Hallsdóttir. It is said that the reason for her refusal was economic; she preferred for her daughter to benefit from the inheritance. Sturla Sighvatsson tries to help Ingimundr by kidnapping Jóriðr. But 'persuasion' is of no avail in this instance. Sturla has to send her home again. Without her consent or that of her relatives, the rejected suitor can get nowhere. For Sturla Þórðarson, who later married Jóriðr's daughter, her refusal must have been an amusing story at Ingimundr's and his family's expense. Trying to coerce an acceptance from a woman who was her own *giptingar-maðr* was not the way to increase his popularity.

¹⁰⁸ Sts, I, 234–35.

¹⁰⁹ Sts, I, 235: 'ok váru þeir samfarar góðar'.

¹¹⁰ Sts, I, 235: 'ef eigi þætti ósæmeliga fyrir henni sét'.

Sturla was not alone in holding to this fundamentally heroic conception of consent in the latter half of the thirteenth century. *Þórðar saga kakali* tells the story of the marriage of Steinvör Sighvatsdóttir and Hálfðan Sæmundarson.¹¹¹ Their relationship becomes rather strained when Hálfðan shows reluctance to help Steinvör's brother come to power in Iceland. Her incitement resembles that of the women in the sagas of Icelanders: 'I have seldom goaded him in serious matters, but now I will make it clear that little will remain of our relationship if you do not help my brother Þórðr. Then what is less usual will happen: I will take up weapons and ask if anyone will follow me, and I will give you the keys to the women's quarters.'¹¹² Hálfðan initially gives little reaction to the incitement, but promises nevertheless to support his brother-in-law if he has more men with him. Later Hálfðan becomes Þórðr's mainstay, even though his family connection with Þórðr's opponent is just as close. Hálfðan clearly proves himself worthy of Steinvör; we hear of no more threats of impending divorce.

Porgils saga skarða tells the story of Halldórr Dálksson's daughter being married off against her will in the 1250s: 'She answered hesitantly, but the priest Halldórr and his son Þorsteinn received the proposal well.'¹¹³ This marriage is never mentioned again in the saga; either the author did not regard it as important, or assumed his audience knew how the marriage had turned out. What we should notice is that the saga writer found it worthwhile to mention the daughter's reluctance to marry; he could have been content with saying that they were married. Gossip on the local grapevine had its symbolic social value in Iceland; perhaps the saga writer wanted to include a little dig at either the priest Halldor or the man who married the girl by mentioning her aversion to the match.

The late contemporary sagas show few traces of a purely canonical understanding of consent in the period before 1300. A good relationship between husband and wife still has a more important place in Icelanders' conceptual universe than the presence of romantic love before the marriage. The woman's own will at the time the marriage is arranged is not emphasized to the same degree that it is in *Laxdæla saga* or *Njáls saga*. These later sagas idealize instead the duty of the *giptingarmaðr* to evaluate a match in the best interests of the woman and society. But the emotional bond makes the lasting, happy marriages superior to the arranged, skewed marriages. This

¹¹¹ This saga was written by an anonymous writer, probably in the 1270s, but abridged in the Sturlunga compilation; cf. Jónas Kristjánsson, *Eddas*, p. 198. See also Orning, 'Statsutvikling i Norge', on the saga's portrayal of Þórðr kakali's fight for power on Iceland, and Agnes S. Arnórsdóttir, *Konur og vígamenn*, on Steinvör. On the basis of her high status and personal qualities, she later became a negotiator in conflicts.

¹¹² Sts, II, 6: 'hefi ek hann ok sjaldan eggjat at ganga í stórmæli, en nú mun ek þat bert gera, at lítit mun verða okkart samþykki, ef þú veitir eigi Þórði, bróður mínum. Num þá svá fara, sem minnr er at sköpuðu, at ek mun taka vápinn ok vita, ef nökkurir menn vili fylgja mér, en ek mun fá þer af hendi búrluklana.'

¹¹³ Sts, II, 215: 'ok svaraði hon því seinliga, en Halldórr prestur ok Þorsteinn, son hans, tóku því vel'.

can be interpreted as part of a new ideology of marriage for a society where the dividing lines between aristocracy and peasantry were widening.¹¹⁴ Sturla Þórðarson did his part to promulgate this ideology; and in that sense, he was not too far removed from the consent ideology of *Laxdæla saga*.

New Gender Constructions and Women's Consent

The Icelandic sagas of the late Middle Ages are an important source for understanding how the doctrine of consent became established in Iceland. The relationship between Bishop Árni Þorláksson's Christian law (1275) and the secular collection of laws known as *Jónsbók* (1281) in Iceland was the same as in Norway; the Church demanded consent for women, while the secular law-books stressed the parents' right to decide on their daughters' marriages. Agnes S. Arnórsdóttir researched Icelandic marriage cases from the late Middle Ages and showed that canon law did gain a foothold in rituals and ideas surrounding the contracting of marriages.¹¹⁵ The saga material supplements diplomatic material by setting love affairs, courtships, marital relations, and gender relations in a wider context. Was consent linked to a more courtly-romantic love discourse or did rational motivations and parental control overshadow the individual's choice? What changes in the relations between the sexes led to the vow of fidelity becoming 'the point of no return'? What advice did the female portion of the saga audience receive with regard to their behaviour towards suitors and husbands? How did clerical saga-writers solve the problem of emphasizing a woman's right to give her consent while avoiding the encouragement of secret marriages?

Icelandic saga material from the late Middle Ages is quite comprehensive. Thus, I will limit myself to examining courtships and gender relations in three sagas: *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, *Kláruss saga*, and *Víglundar saga*. I have chosen these three because, in my view, they show variations on the typical love stories and matrimonial norms Icelanders regarded as normal in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* is a legendary saga; that is, the events are taken from the diffuse period prior to the unification of Norway into a single kingdom and the settlement of Iceland. *Kláruss saga* is a *riddarasaga* about princes and princesses and has a clearly clerical tendency. *Víglundar saga* is a late saga of Icelanders that deals with different aspects of love, fate, and women's choices and obedience.

¹¹⁴ A number of aristocratic Icelandic men enjoyed a deep emotional bond with their wives which became especially evident if the wife died first. Most famous is perhaps Gizurr Þorvaldsson's mourning for Gróa (Sts, I, 494, 496), but also the husband of Steinunn Jónsdóttir mourns after her death (Sts, II, 97).

¹¹⁵ Agnes S. Arnórsdóttir, 'Two Models of Marriage?'; Agnes S. Arnórsdóttir, 'Marriage in the Middle Ages: Canon Law and Nordic Family Relations', in *Norden og Europa i mid-delalderen*, ed. by Per Ingesman and Thomas Lindkvist, Rapport til Det 24. Nordiske Historikermøde, 1 (Århus: Jysk Selskab for historie, 2001), pp. 174–202.

Men in Pursuit of Women's Consent

Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar is the story of the quest for a good bride. One by one, the four male main characters go courting. This legendary saga, believed to have been written at the end of the thirteenth century, has not undeservedly been called 'the acme of Icelandic bridal-quest romance'.¹¹⁶ The saga influenced a variety of legendary sagas and Icelandic *riddarasögur*. *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* must have struck a chord with late medieval Icelanders. There were bridal quests in earlier saga literature, for example in Snorri Sturluson's retelling of Freyr's pursuit of Gerðr in his *Edda* and the courtships in *Völsunga saga*, but in *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, the quest for the right bride is the saga's *raison d'être*. Let us examine how the saga manages to present love, courtship, and marriage in such a way that it captivated Icelanders in the fourteenth century.

We join the saga at the prelude to the second courtship. It all begins when the king's son Hrólfr Gautreksson is urged by his brother Ketill to find himself a wife. Ketill thinks Hrólfr has everything he needs to appear respectable except for a woman at his side. He says that Hrólfr's reputation and that of the kingdom at large will be enhanced if he finds a beautiful and capable woman to marry. Ketill advises Hrólfr to court Þorbjörg, daughter of King Eiríkr of Sweden. She is, according to Ketill, the best match in the North,¹¹⁷ but she is also notorious for her animosity towards men. This makes Hrólfr unsure: 'It is ill when a man foolishly aims high in a vain cause, because he will fall. Now if I go, as you wish, to ask for the daughter of King Eiríkr of Svíþjóð, then I think it likely that I will get a refusal and some shameful words along with it. I also think that I will have to put up with it, because I will hardly get the chance to take vengeance on such a powerful ruler; and that is something I have little liking for.'¹¹⁸

Instead, Hrólfr remains a contented bachelor for several more years. He goes on a Viking raid every summer and his name becomes widely known. However, Hrólfr does not forget Þorbjörg. He hears continually of new aspects of her nature that fascinate him. She has become so unruly that her father has had to give her a third of his kingdom. She has taken the name Þorbergr and rules her part of the kingdom like a king. Many kings and sons of kings have tried to court her, but all have come up against the might of her army. For Þorbergr/Þorbjörg, no man has proved good enough, and all suitors have had to return home in shame, if they survive at all.

¹¹⁶ Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance*, p. 25.

¹¹⁷ HsG ch. 5 (6), p. 10: 'ei mun fáz jafnagætr kostr á norðrlöndum fyrir allra hluta sakir'.

¹¹⁸ HsG ch. 5 (6), p. 10: 'Er þat ilt, at ætla sér dul þá, at vánarlaust sé, at hann geti upprisit, þóat hann falli. Nú þótt ek færa, sem þú vildir, at biðja dóttur Eiríks konungs á Svíþjóð, þá þættumz ek víta, at mér mundi synjat konunnar ok ei ólíkara, at ek fenga nöckur hæðilig orð ok yrða ek þó at þola þat alt með því, at ek hefí engi föng á, at hefnaz fyrir ríkis sakir; munda ek við þat una stórilla.'

Finally, however, Hrólfr works himself up to go courting. The risks are high; he is in danger of being a target of ridicule for the rest of his life. The first time he fails. He is run out of Þorbergr's kingdom with all his warriors. But Hrólfr comes back and shows that he is craftier and more capable than Þorbergr. When he finally succeeds, he wins enormous prestige and becomes the foremost of all kings. But to do this, Hrólfr must try his strength against the woman herself, not against her father. To win the woman, he must focus his attention on her, break down her resistance, and convince her that he is good enough (in Þorbergr's case, that marriage is even worthwhile for her in the first place). Only after this has been done does Hrólfr go back to Þorbjörg's father to obtain his approval for the marriage.

In *Kláruss saga* and *Víglundar saga* we are moving in parallel literary universes: the former is set in a southern European court, while the latter describes events in Iceland in the period from the settlement to the end of the tenth century. But in both sagas, the quest for the right bride is the most important goal of the hero. Klárus, son of the King of Saxony, has heard of the beautiful and clever French princess Serena. The things he hears about her cause him to fall deeply in love with her, and he determines to win her. But at the welcome banquet at her court, he is unfortunate in his handling of a soft-boiled egg. He is shown the door in the most humiliating manner and asked never to show his face there again. However, he returns disguised as a merchant and wins her through her weakness for beautiful things.

Víglundar saga distinguishes itself from the two other sagas in that the love between the man and woman is mutual from the beginning. The obstacles to their marriage appear in the form of a mother, father, or envious rival. This is a plot we already know from skalds' sagas from around 1200, but in those sagas the suitor was often *not* interested in pursuing a formal courtship. In contrast to its literary predecessors, the lovers' aim in *Víglundar saga* is to turn their love into marriage.

We shall come back to these stories. Let us first look at the role of marriage in two sagas from the late Middle Ages that were *not* concerned with courtships. *Qrvar-Odds saga* has a hero who wanders from country to country for three hundred years. He marries many times, but the marriages have no particular role in the development of the plot. In Qrvar-Oddr's life, the focus is rather the women's heroic love for him, their will to be married to the best man.¹¹⁹ A lack of interest in the role of marriage in the hero's life is also apparent in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*. The eponymous hero is described as having no interest in women: 'I will not settle down on a farm or get married, because I have no concern for women.'¹²⁰ The saga describes the young Göngu-Hrólfr as a sort of Ashlad (ON *kolbíttr*) from the folk tales, a youth of whom nothing great is expected. His antipathy to marriage and women thus seems to be a

¹¹⁹ There are parallels in other *fornaldarsögur*, especially in *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*; cf. ÞsV chs 2–10.

¹²⁰ GHs ch. 4, p. 174: 'Eigi mun ek búa ok eigi kvænast, því at konur skulu mér ekki.'

sign of his immaturity; running a farm and keeping a wife are characteristics of a participating member of society. His journeys abroad lead him to help a suitor who wants to win a beautiful princess. In contrast to the actual suitor, Gǫngu-Hrólfr proves time after time that he is the true equal of the king's daughter. In the end it is Gǫngu-Hrólfr who does get her. Without intending to, he finally reaches the 'goal' of becoming a married man.¹²¹

Idealization and Pacification of Love

Sagas of undoubted thirteenth-century origin had major problems with idealizing love before marriage. As a rule, it led to conflicts of honour between suitors and heads of households. In the late Middle Ages, saga writers sought to resolve this difficulty by linking the suitor's social status with that of the woman. The good love affair had taken on a new social significance because it reinforced the parties' mutual social status instead of dividing two households from one another. Winning a woman's acknowledgement and love had become a very important factor in the process leading up to betrothal and marriage. The axis of conflict ran between equal men and women, not between suitors and *giptingarmenn* who were allocated different status and honour through the relationship.

Courtships in the sagas can at times be charged with honour rationales and violence. In *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, all the courtships involve physical struggles against powerful obstacles, often posed by the woman herself because she wishes to defend herself against unworthy suitors. Nevertheless, this does not tip the balance of society; the opposition can be interpreted as a symbol of how much is required of a suitor in winning an independent woman's heart. King Hrólfr, however, disapproves of the use of violence regardless of the circumstances. The saga's first three courtships have caused so much damage and loss of life that he does not want to go through with yet another such courtship.¹²² This negative view of violence also has consequences for Hrólfr's attitude towards seduction. On the way to Ireland, Hrólfr and his foster-brother Ásmundr meet an old woman who asks for help. A young man has been coming to her house to try and seduce her beautiful daughter. She asks

¹²¹ *Gǫngu-Hrólfs saga* seems to maintain a certain ironic distance from the bridal-quest sagas. Heroes such as Qrvar-Oddr and Gǫngu-Hrólfr remind us more of Óláfr Tryggvason, who occasionally meets queens who admire him. In particular, GHs ch. 20 shows great similarity to Oddr Snorrason's *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*. The king's daughter Ingigerðr has collected all the men in the kingdom to find one who will meet the giant Sǫrkvi in single combat. She looks closely into the eyes of all the men present; only Gǫngu-Hrólfr does not meet her eye because he is not interested in her. Still, she chooses him to fight on her behalf, and states that no one deserves her more than he does.

¹²² HsG ch. 29 (21), p. 48.

Hrólfr to talk to the man and make him stop visiting.¹²³ Hrólfr resolves the matter in a peaceful fashion; he thinks the fellow looks like a gifted and brave young man. After fighting with Hrólfr's *hirð* in Ireland, Hrólfr gives the woman's daughter to the young man in marriage. In this episode, a seduction — which is by nature a deed with negative consequences for society — is turned into a prelude to marriage.¹²⁴ Love is removed from the traditional honour discourse so that opponents to the love affair are evaluated negatively.¹²⁵

In contrast to most early sagas, the late sagas promote a refined and courtly form of address as part of a good, loving relationship. In the late Middle Ages, we often see depictions of beautiful and courtly ladies. Their conduct obliges men to behave in like fashion. In *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, even the 'villain' King Eiríkr respects these rules — because he is in love. He has killed the father of the beautiful Ingigerðr, plundered his kingdom, and now wants to marry her. Ingigerðr, however, appeals to the code of ethics a king must follow: 'No man can justly take the name of king unless he keeps his promises to a young maiden.' The saga says that King Eiríkr is overcome with love for her and declares: 'The man is utterly shameful who would not keep his word to you.'¹²⁶ This fidelity particularly applies to the woman's discretion over her sexuality. King Eiríkr promises to let Ingigerðr alone until the day of their wedding.¹²⁷

¹²³ HsG ch. 32 (25), p. 53: 'Mun hann gera fyrir orð yður, at láta af fíflingum við dóttur mína.'

¹²⁴ Ásmundr, the companion of Hrólfr, is not well disposed to the 'old hag'; he says he want to free her from getting any older and cuts off her head. The reaction of Hrólfr is fierce; Ásmundr has never seen him so angry before. The episode contrasts very effectively the violence of Ásmundr and Hrólfr's defensive attitude to the old woman. This inclination towards the peaceful solution to love affairs is also clear from other *formaldarsögur*; cf. *Orvar-Odds saga*, ch. 20, where Hjálmar refuses to challenge the father of Ingibjörg, his beloved, after his proposal is refused, and *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd*, ch. 15, where the author explicitly explains that Tristram does not seduce Ísodd because of malice towards King Mórodd, but because God has destined him to do so.

¹²⁵ There are several examples of idealized love relationships in the late sagas of Icelanders as well, even when their kinsmen oppose them; e.g. HsÍ ch. 2 (Sigríðr-Óláfr Hávarðsson); Flj ch. 13 (Helge Droplaugarson-Helga Þorbjarnardóttir); *Sǫrle þáttr* in Ljós (Sǫrli Brodd-Helgason-Þórdís Guðmundardóttir); Þshr chs 3, 14 (Ásbjörn Þorsteinsson-Sigríðr Þórðardóttir); Flóa ch. 18 (Þorgrímur örrabeinn-Áshildir).

¹²⁶ GHs ch. 3, p. 171: 'Þá segir Ingigerðr konungsdóttir: "Eigi má sá með réttu konungsnafn bera, er eigi heldr þat, er hann lofar einni jungfrú. Mun ek þá yðr samþykkjast ok gera yðvarn vilja, ef þér haldið yður orð ok veitið mér bæn þá, er ek bið yðr, en fyrr en ek gangi nauðig með nokkurum manni, þá skal ek fyrr heldr veita mér bráðan bana, ok nýtr mín þá engi." Konunginum rann mikill ástarhugr til hennar ok mælti: "Verði sá niðingr, er eigi heldr orð sín við yðr, ok kjós á sǫmu stundu, en ek skal veita."'

¹²⁷ Several late narratives explicitly stigmatize male heroes of the past who take women against their will; cf. Qs ch. 18 (Viking laws of Hjálmar); Hálf's ch. 5 (10) (Viking laws of Hálf'srekkingum); Finnb ch. 14 (Finnbogi takes Ragnhildr Álfisdóttir in a courtly fashion: 'Vertu

In the courtship sagas, honour is still important, but the dishonoured party is no longer the head of household. Instead, it is commonly a woman who has the power to inflict dishonour on the suitor through humiliation, such as we saw that Hrólfr Gautreksson and Klárus were exposed to, or that it is the woman being pursued who tries to defend her own honour.

Women's Consent and Submission

In the early Middle Ages, the woman's responsibility for her own honour in the love relationship was primarily linked to the suitor's social status. Until the High Middle Ages, the difference between talking to a man and sleeping with him was of little concern. From the fourteenth century onward, a tangible sensibility developed regarding women's sexual status. Many sagas make a distinction between women who have had a sexual relationship before marriage and good ladies. Honourable suitors do not threaten women's sexual honour. But when all is said and done, the responsibility lies with the women themselves and not with their *giptingarmenn*.¹²⁸

A characteristic of sagas from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries is that the woman's will is linked to an ideal of submission. In *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* there are four courtships and an equal number of examples of a woman's consent being important. The saga begins with the ageing King Gautrekr's courtship of the beautiful Ingibjörg. In the best saga tradition, she has refused all previous suitors because they

kát, því at ekki skal ek níðast á þér'); *Skálda saga* (an entertaining story about three of Haraldr hárfagri's skalds who each offer a ring to a kinswoman of the king in order to spend a night in bed with her — if she consents ('ef þu villt samþykkia', Hb, p. 445).

¹²⁸ In *Eindriða þáttur ok Erlings* Eindriði sleeps in the same bed as Sigríðr, daughter of the magnate Erlingr Skjálgsson: Flat, II, 193–97. Erlingr considers this act as shaming to him, and wants revenge. Eindriði defends himself in a courtly fashion: 'I only slept with her in such manner that it was neither shameful for her nor her kinsmen, and I did it because she asked me to rather than to your disgrace' ('suo at æins suaf ek þar hia henni at henni uar þat æinge skom ne frændum hennar ok gerda ek þetta mæirr firir hennar bæn en til vsæmdar vit ydr': Flat, II, 195). He adds a stanza stating that only their lips joined and nothing else. Eindriði later undergoes an ordeal to prove his innocence. Other episodes where women are degraded through premarital intercourse, or it is explicitly stated that they are not 'ruined' ('spillt') by illegitimate sexual relations, are found in *Kjaln* ch. 16, p. 40 ('ek vil nú þó ekki elska hana, siðan Kolfiðr hefir spillt henni'); *Ysv* ch. 7, where seducing women is likened to demonic magic; *Vgl* ch. 23, p. 115 ('ek vilda geyma hana þér til handa, ok er hon óspillt af mér [. . .] höfum vit ok aldri undir einum klæðum legit, því at rekkjustokkr tekr upp á millum rúma okkarra, þó at vit höfum haft eitt áklæði; ætla ek, at henni hafi þat raun verit né skript, þó at hon kenndi öngvan karlmann, meðan þú lifðir'); *Cl*s, p. 74 ('þetta byrjar oss eigi að göra fyrir enskis konar skyld, að selja svá svívirðliga várn heiðr ok sæmð, útan með einni grein: vili þér játa mér ok sverja, að þér skulu fá mín eptir födur míns raði til dróttningar sem útekit konungsbarn ok oss skal hér engi opinber blygð í vreða, þá munum vér á þetta hætta').

were not good enough. Gautrekr is fascinated by what he hears about her. But when he comes to court, another man has already asked for Ingibjörg as his wife. Ingibjörg herself is not at all negative towards the first suitor; he is both young and handsome. King Gautrekr asks Ingibjörg's father for help in getting Ingibjörg. Ingibjörg's father, however, does not wish to offend any of the suitors. He leaves all in Ingibjörg's own hands: 'I will let her choose a man herself, because that is her request.'¹²⁹

For Ingibjörg, the choice is difficult because she evaluates her suitors rationally. She compares the two men to trees. The young suitor is like a tree in spring with the potential for a future harvest, while Gautrekr is like a fully-grown, magnificent tree. Ingibjörg finally chooses Gautrekr; she knows what she is getting. That a tree looks promising is no guarantee that it will be just as fine in the autumn, she reasons. For Gautrekr, the choice has a rejuvenating effect; he 'leaps up' and embraces Ingibjörg. When his rival challenges him to a fight, he proves himself the stronger of the two and kills him and his men. Ingibjörg has chosen wisely, and the saga speaks in a formulaic way of the great love that grew between them.¹³⁰

The two next female main characters in *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* use their freedom of discretion to dismiss all their suitors. Þorbjörg, alias King Þorbergr, has demanded the right to decide for herself with regard to marriage. Hrólfr Gautreksson's first attempt to win her consent ends with Þorbjörg/Þorbergr chasing Hrólfr and his men out of her kingdom with such force that they only escape with their lives. His second attempt succeeds. He deals Þorbergr a real physical blow to get her in his power. But even when he has proven his superior strength, he considers it inappropriate to force Þorbergr/Þorbjörg to do something against her will. Gaining her consent is more important than gaining her hand in marriage by force. Þorbergr concedes she has met her match, and the saga tells us that after the wedding they loved one another deeply.¹³¹

Hrólfr's brother Ketill decides not long afterward to court a Russian princess. The princess is so conceited that she believes no one is worthy of her. She has twelve berserks who always protect her from suitors. The woman herself incites them to attack Ketill and Hrólfr. Only after a long battle in which the berserks are killed and the Russian king defeated is there talk of marriage. But it takes place with both the king's and the princess's consent. They celebrate the wedding together in full friendship and harmony.¹³²

¹²⁹ HsG ch. 2 (1), p. 4: 'Nú mun ek þessum vanda snúa, ok láta hana kjósa sér mann til handa; hefir hón þess beðit mik.'

¹³⁰ HsG ch. 2, p. 6: 'eptir veizluna takaz með þeim góðar ástir'. This episode draws on Vls ch. 11; see Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance*, pp. 27–28. An important difference, however, is that we get much more knowledge of the woman's considerations in HsG.

¹³¹ HsG ch. 15 (14), p. 25: 'Tókuz með þeim góðar ástir.'

¹³² Women's consent is important also in other *fornaldarsögur*, e.g. GHs chs 34–36; ÞsV chs 1–2. Jenny Jochens has argued that consent was more important in sagas set in exotic lands, thus making consent itself exotic; see Jenny M. Jochens, 'Consent in Marriage: Old Norse Law,

Ostensibly, then, fathers are retreating from the marriage process. But *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* assumes that fathers still have a measure of authority over their daughters. It is worthwhile to note that Hrólfr goes to Þorbergr's father as a matter of course to ask for permission to court his daughter. King Eiríkr first regards Hrólfr as a petty king. His queen, however, thinks Hrólfr is the best man she has seen in appearance, chivalry, and strength. When Hrólfr defeats Þorbergr's army, he shows himself to be a chivalrous victor. He allows Þorbjörg/Þorbergr and all her men their freedom if her father will determine the conditions for the peace agreement. King Eiríkr wants Þorbergr/Þorbjörg to give her consent to marry Hrólfr. It is not until her father gives the word that she relinquishes her king's name and man's role: 'she threw off her warrior clothing and all royal garments and took on a woman's dress, a dress that suited a wealthy maiden and a king's daughter well. She then went to the women's quarters and sat down with her mother.'¹³³ The saga tells us that from that day onward, she proves to be the courtliest and wisest woman of all, without ever needing to overstep the boundary from feminine to masculine. She masters the role of woman better than the rest; and for this reason she lays the entire settlement of the marriage in her father's hands. Even if she has picked and chosen between men before, after her defeat she must live according to norms like obedience and submissiveness, just as other women must. Thus, in *Hrólfs saga* the parents give prior approval to Hrólfr's courtship of their daughter, but have no influence on the battle that takes place between the suitor and their daughter. It is only after this battle is determined that Þorbjörg puts the matter into her parents' hands. Consent shifts from the parents to their daughter and back again.

The issues surrounding women's consent and parents' freedom of discretion are taken up in their full breadth in *Víglundar saga*. The canonical doctrine of consent, how the characters interpreted it, or how the use of it influenced social relations, all these questions are dealt with uncommonly clearly in the saga.¹³⁴ The saga is built up

Life, and Literature', *Scandinavian Studies*, 58 (1986), 142–76 (pp. 159–65); Jochens, "'Með Jákvæði Hennar Sjálfrar": Consent as Signifier in the Old Norse World', in *Consent and Coercion to Sex and Marriage in Ancient and Medieval Societies*, ed. by Angeliki E. Laiou (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1993), pp. 271–89 (pp. 283–84); Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), pp. 49–51. One argument against this is that there are many motives found in both *fornaldarsögur norðurlanda* and *fornaldarsögur suðurlanda*; see Peter Hallberg, 'Some Aspects of the Fornaldarsögur as a Corpus', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 97 (1982), 1–35. Another aspect is that foreign women more often are independent of any guardian, with the consequence that their free consent is more visible.

¹³³ HsG ch. 14 (13), p. 24: 'Hón kastaði þá af sér herklæðum ok öllum konungligum búnaði, en tók upp kvennzligan búnað, svá sem heyrði til ríki mey ok konungs dóttur; geck hón þá í skemmu ok settiz á dýnur hjá móður sinni.'

¹³⁴ On the influence of this saga on other texts, and on the use of other genres in this saga, see Marianne E. Kalinke, 'Víglundar saga: An Icelandic Bridal-Quest Romance', *Skáldska-*

around two love stories and two marriages. Like many sagas of Icelanders, the prehistory is set in Norway but the main action takes place in Iceland. The prehistory not only describes the main characters' parents, but is also a thematic preparation for the saga's great love drama between Ketilríðr and Víglundr. The first love story starts when Þorgrímr meets the beautiful Ólof, daughter of the magnate Earl Þórir, and they fall in love.¹³⁵ Þorgrímr asks for her hand, but Þórir does not want to give him his daughter. Þorgrímr nevertheless stays with Þórir and Ólof for three days, and the saga notes that 'some people said that they bound themselves together with their word'.¹³⁶ Þórir does not hear of this rumour and instead wants to marry Ólof off to the magnate Ketill. But Ólof 'gave neither her agreement nor her consent to this'.¹³⁷ Þorgrímr does not consider this the last word. At the wedding of Ólof and Ketill, he argues that Ólof is *his* wife, not Ketill's. He considers the betrothal arranged by Earl Þórir and Ketill null and void; the vow between himself and Ólof means that they are the ones that are truly married.

Despite Þorgrímr's somewhat anachronistic rhetoric, the saga writer was quite aware that, in the tenth century, a betrothal agreement without the bride's consent was enough to create a valid marriage. The episode is worth citing in full because it is such a good illustration of how women's consent was understood in relation to the traditional means of creating a marriage:

Þorgrímr mælti: 'Hefir þú, Ketill, keypt Ólufu?' Ketill kvað þat satt vera. 'Var þat nokkut með hennar ráði gert?' segir Þorgrímr. 'Ek ætlaða, at Þórir jarl mundi sjálfir eiga at ráða dóttur sinni,' segir Ketill, 'ok mundi þat kaup lögligt vera, sen hann gerði.' Þorgrímr segir: 'Þat segir ek, at vit Ólof hofum eíða bundit, at hon skyldi ǫngvan mann eiga nema mik, ok segi hon, hvárt eigi er svá.' En Ólof kvað þat satt. 'Þá þykjumst ek eiga konuna,' segir Þorgrímr. (Vgl ch. 6, p. 73)

Þorgrímr said: 'Ketill, have you bought Ólof?' Ketill said that this was true. 'Was that anything to do with her own counsel?' says Þorgrímr. 'I thought that Earl Þórir could decide for himself about his daughter,' says Ketill, 'and that the agreement he made would be valid enough.' Þorgrímr says: 'But I say that Ólof and I have bound each other with oaths so that she shall not have any other man than me, and she can tell if this is not so.' Ólof said that this was true. 'Then I think she is my wife,' says Þorgrímr.

The encounter ends with Þorgrímr whisking the bride away from the wedding. He is declared an outlaw in Norway, and the couple flees to Iceland. It is there that the wedding feast is held, and they are now regarded as married by everyone. This

parmál, 3 (1994), 119–43 (pp. 120–23), and Torfí H. Tulinius, 'Landafraði og flokkun fornsaga', *Skáldskaparmál*, 1 (1990), 142–56.

¹³⁵ Vgl ch. 5, p. 70: 'En er Þorgrímr sá Ólofu, lagði ann þegar ástarhug til hennar, ok svá fór henni til hans, at hon unni honum.'

¹³⁶ Vgl ch. 6, p. 71: 'ok segja þat nökkurir menn, at þá hafi þau bundit sitt eiginorð.'

¹³⁷ Vgl ch. 6 p. 71: 'Lagði Ólof þar ekki jáyrði til né samþykki.'

episode thus puts secret consent between a man and woman before the father's right of discretion.¹³⁸

The love story in the second part of the saga has many points in common with that of Þorgrímr and Ólof, but the two lovers, interestingly enough, decide to act differently. Þorgrímr's son Víglundr falls in love with Ketilríðr, and she reciprocates his feelings. They are presented as *jafnræði* in every way. People think that the district has never seen such wise or courteous young people. We are told that they come to love one another deeply.¹³⁹ Víglundr wants them to bind their love with oaths. Surprisingly, Ketilríðr says no, in clear contrast to Ólof. She gives three reasons for her answer. Firstly, she thinks that Víglundr is not mature enough, and young men are not always dependable in such matters. Secondly, she does not want to enter into any promise before she has consulted her father. Thirdly, she fears that her mother will want to interfere in her marriage plans. Ketilríðr's mother does not like her and will hinder any marriage based on love. Oaths between them now will only make things more complicated in the future, she seems to be saying. But if Ketilríðr could choose for herself, she declares, she would not want anyone other than Víglundr.

Ketilríðr is right in thinking that her mother would not marry her off to Víglundr. While her father is more positive towards her love for Víglundr, her mother tries to find every obstacle to prevent the young lovers from succeeding.¹⁴⁰ When Víglundr is in Norway, Ketilríðr's mother finds an elderly suitor for her daughter. Ketilríðr's father is really on the side of Ketilríðr and Víglundr, even when he seems to go along with his wife's intrigues. Ketilríðr submissively and obediently leaves the settlement of the matter with him: 'I will not act against his will.'¹⁴¹ Her father loves her and is sorry that her upcoming marriage will be a sham. Ketilríðr never gives her consent, they hold no wedding feast, and they never sleep together. However, everyone believes them to be married; the financial agreements seem to be in order. This keeps Víglundr's

¹³⁸ There is a close analogue to this episode in GsK chs 4 and 8. Gunnarr Keldugnúpsfífl is in conflict with the brothers and father of his beloved Helga throughout the first part of the saga. However, Gunnarr and Helga have an understanding: they promise that 'he should never have any other woman, and she have no other man, if they could decide themselves'. But as in Vgl, there is an ideal in GsK that women should obey their fathers in marital affairs; see GsK ch. 10 (Helgi Þorbjarnarson-Ingibjörg Geirsdóttir).

¹³⁹ The love story of Víglundr and Ketilríðr seems inspired by *Flóres saga ok Blankiflúr*, translated into Old Norse in the middle of the thirteenth century. Like the couple in the romance, Víglundr and Ketilríðr were born in the same year, brought up together, and can hardly cope with their separation. Another similarity between the sagas is the clerical ideals; cf. Geraldine Barnes, 'Some Observations on *Flóres saga ok Blankiflúr*', *Scandinavian Studies*, 49 (1977), 48–66.

¹⁴⁰ Vgl ch. 12, p. 82: 'fyrirmundu þeim at njótast'.

¹⁴¹ Vgl ch. 18, p. 98: 'Faðir mun því ráða [. . .] því at ek má ekki, enda vil ek ekki í móti hans vilja gera. En vera má, at mér sé ekki hægra en þér, ef öðrvíss verðr, en þó mun þat sínu fram fara.'

rivals away from Ketilríðr. When Víglundr comes back from Norway, it transpires that Ketilríðr's husband is a relative of his. The sham marriage is annulled without Ketilríðr having lost her maidenhood, and her father can finally give her to Víglundr.

The understanding of consent in *Víglundar saga* follows canon law. But the saga also attaches a moral proviso to women's consent. It is clear that the two marriages in the saga represent a shift in the direction of greater respect for the father's advice. The vow of Ólof and Ketill unleashes a variety of conflicts and leads in the end to their expulsion from society, while Ketilríðr's submission and patience mean that the love story in Iceland is resolved in a much more peaceful way. Marianne Kalinke has pointed out that 'the one [bridal-quest] occurring in Norway is achieved through aggression, while the bridal quest in Iceland is brought to a successful conclusion primarily through reliance on wit, patience, and perspicacity'.¹⁴² New patterns for female gender roles are thus presented as a key to a peaceful solution of the social dilemma.

In *Kláruss saga*, the ideal of the woman's submissive consent is given even clearer expression, despite a particularly independent Princess Serena in the first part of the saga. The saga is especially interesting because it can be placed fairly certainly in time and milieu: a manuscript of *Kláruss saga* actually says that the saga was translated and brought to Iceland by the learned Norwegian Jón Halldórsson, Bishop of Skálholt 1322–39.¹⁴³ *Sögupáttur af Jóni Halldórssyni biskupi* states that Jón was tremendously clever at 'entertaining and amusing others [. . .]. He could tell secular stories wonderfully well'.¹⁴⁴ Jón Halldórsson also used these stories to season his sermons. Jón's background was in the Dominican order, a monastic movement that

¹⁴² Kalinke, '*Víglundar saga*', p. 126.

¹⁴³ Cls p. 2; cf. Alfred Jakobsen, *Studier i 'Clarus saga': Til spørsmålet om sagaens norske proveniens*, Årbok for Universitetet i Bergen, Humanistisk serie, 1963:2 (Bergen: Universitetsforlaget, 1964) pp. 104–11. It is contested whether the saga is a translation from Latin or not; cf. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, '*Viktors saga ok Blávus*: Sources and Characteristics', in *Viktors saga ok Blávus*, ed. by Jónas Kristjánsson, Riddarasögur, 2 (Reykjavík: Handritastofnun Íslands, 1964), pp. cix–ccxii (p. cxii). The attribution to Jón Halldórsson might have been included in order to give the saga higher prominence; cf. Jakobsen, *Studier i 'Clarus saga'*, p. 40. It is also contested whether Jón Halldórsson had anything to do with the saga; the scribe might have connected the saga to the *ævintýri* of Jón and put Jón's name on it. Karl G. Johansson, 'A Scriptorium in Northern Iceland: *Clarus saga* (AM 657 a–b 4to) Revisited', in *Sagas and the Norwegian Experience*, ed. by Jan Ragnar Hagland, 10th International Saga Conference (Trondheim: NTNU, Senter for middelalderstudier, 1997), pp. 323–31, argues that it was connected to the monastery of Þingeyrar, led by Bergir Sokkason and Arngrímur Brandsson í spissen. Anyhow, *Kláruss saga* is clearly written in a clerical milieu, and it is thus safe to assume that these bishops or monks found the story very useful.

¹⁴⁴ JþH ch. 2, p. 448: 'því at enginn maðr þvilíkrar stétar mátti framar fella sik til að vera mönnum til hugléttis ok gleði [. . .] því vóru frásagnir hans sumar bæði veraldlegar ok stórorðar.'

laid great emphasis on the use of *exempla* in sermons to instruct the hearers. These *exempla* were stories that combined entertainment with a moral. The idea was that people could more easily identify with the characters in these stories than the unrealistic saints' lives or abstract homilies. Is it possible that *Kláruss saga* was used as an example to teach Icelanders about Christian marital morality?

The first part of the saga tells of the emperor's son Klárus's attempt to win the beautiful but proud Serena. He thinks she is the only woman in the world who can match his own power and initiative.¹⁴⁵ Serena's father has little to say; his daughter is so wise that she governs the country along with him and is therefore quite independent with regard to her own marriage. Accordingly, Klárus goes to her first. He 'wants to know whether their minds were in agreement on this matter'.¹⁴⁶ Klárus's fine clothes and courtly manners impress every woman at court except Serena. She is also far superior to Klárus in the art of speaking, courtly conduct, and learning.¹⁴⁷ Serena uses her wisdom and power to humiliate Klárus in the most scheming ways; he finally concludes that he would rather have lost all his lands and gold than to return home in such shame.

With the help of cunning and magic, Klárus nevertheless manages to defeat Serena. In the second part of the saga it is Serena who, with the help of the magician Perus, is put to the test. She is cast out into a life of poverty with an ugly and egotistical beggar (who is really Perus) as her only companion. She must work day and night to supply the beggar with food and money; she hardly gets a chance to eat or sleep. But she is persevering and patient; she begins to wonder whether she does not deserve such treatment. She shows by her endurance that her 'true' nature is to be faithful and devoted to a husband. After a year of humbling experiences, the veil of magic is rent and Klárus and Serena marry as equals. Their perseverance is thus rewarded.

¹⁴⁵ Cls, pp. 42–43.

¹⁴⁶ Cls, p. 56: 'segiz þess ok first leita vilja, að þeirra hógir væri samfærir hér um'.

¹⁴⁷ In late medieval sagas women are often more educated and wiser than their suitors; see Marianne E. Kalinke, 'The Foreign Language Requirement in Medieval Icelandic Romance', *Modern Language Review*, 78 (1983), 850–61. These women are most brutal towards their suitors; cf. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, '*Viktors saga ok Blávus*', p. cxxii; Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance*, pp. 76–78. This may not have been too far from reality in many cases; see Susan Groag Bell, 'Medieval Women Book Owners: Arbiters of Lay Piety and Ambassadors of Culture', in *Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Mary Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988), pp. 149–79; Sven-Bertil Jansson, 'Attityder till literacy: Några exempel ur svenskspråkiga texter från senmedeltiden', in *Medeltida skrift- och språkkultur*, ed. by Inger Lindell, *Opuscula*, 2 (Stockholm: Runica et Mediaevalia, 1994), pp. 103–20; Nanna Damsholt, 'Læs ofte og lær så meget du kan! Om kvinders læse – og skrivefærdighed i middelalderen', in *Kirkehistorier: Rapport fra et middelaldersymposium*, ed. by Nanna Damsholt, Grethe Jacobsen, and Niels Henrik Holmqvist-Larsen (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanums forlag, 1996), pp. 57–72; M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066–1307*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), pp. 189–96.

A few have interpreted the maiden-king motif as a result of the Church's hostility to women and their sexuality.¹⁴⁸ However, women's sexuality is never portrayed as negative in itself. It is rather the maiden-kings' opposition to marrying that the saga believes must be altered. The moral comes through clearly at the end of *Kláruss saga*. Instead of ending with the wedding as most such sagas do, there is an epilogue that explains the meaning of what has happened. The epilogue praises Serena as an ideal woman to the saga's readers. During her existence as a beggar-woman, she shows her true virtues and goes from being a hard and ruthless woman to being a virtuous one.¹⁴⁹ The saga's matrimonial moral seems to be directed especially to women. They must not pridefully disregard the general opinion of an appropriate marriage, and of course, married women should virtuously persevere with the men to whom they are married.¹⁵⁰ The saga tries to confine women's consent within a socially acceptable morality.¹⁵¹ It is therefore not inconceivable that *Kláruss saga* could have been used as an *exemplum* in Iceland in the first half of the fourteenth century. Consent should be used with wisdom, and not thrown away in a vain gesture of freedom. Even the worst marriage can be weathered by keeping a submissive attitude; women's perseverance is portrayed as a cornerstone to the indissolubility of the holy sacrament. This last ideal is diametrically opposed to the heroic understanding of

¹⁴⁸ See Glauser, *Isländische Märchensagas*, pp. 206–07; see also Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance*, pp. 78–79; Jochens, *Old Norse Images*, pp. 102–06. In 'Kvinnebiletet i nokre mellomaldrngenrar: Eit opposisjonelt kvinnesyn?', *Edda*, 1982, 341–71, Else Mundal sees the maiden-kings as representative of the strong women in Old Norse society, while Birgit Sawyer, 'Sköldmön och madonnan – kyskhets som ett hot mot samhällsordningen', *Kvinnovetenskaplig tidskrift*, 7 (1986), 3–15, has interpreted the maiden-king as a product of the aristocratic fight against clerical ideals of chastity; to conquer women's defence of their virginity and their own bodies, and their independence of masculine dominance, is ultimately to save the social order.

¹⁴⁹ Cls, pp. 104–06.

¹⁵⁰ Cls, p. 106: 'halda dygð við sína eiginbændr eða unnusta'.

¹⁵¹ There are similar tests on the love of Víglundr and Ketilríðr in *Víglundar saga*. Ketilríðr makes it clear that she will endure whatever trial she is exposed to. When her father (seemingly) marries her to an old man, she grieves but complies: Vgl ch. 20. Víglundr has many opportunities to kill Ketilríðr's husband. He is tempted, but in the end he has too much respect for the sanctity of marriage. When Ketilríðr's aged husband is away, Víglundr also has plenty of opportunities to have an affair with Ketilríðr, but instead he moves away from his beloved to avoid rumours of him seducing Ketilríðr: Vgl ch. 22. In this saga, the man's patience is an ideal alongside the woman's modesty and chastity. Similar examples are found in Frs ch. 10 (Friðþjófr); Þshr chs 6, 10, 13 (Ólof Hrolleifsdóttir); Svarf ch. 17 (Yngvildr fagrinn). In the two latter examples, the wives do *not* want to stay in their marriages, but try to use heroic consent in order to get away from their husbands. The male protagonists, however, voice their contempt of such 'archaic' attitudes; see also Robin Waugh, 'Misogyny, Women's Language, and Love-Language: Yngvildr fagrinn in *Svarfdæla saga*', *Scandinavian Studies*, 70 (1998), 151–94.

consent. The strictly indissoluble character of marriage might have been a hard reality for many women in the late Middle Ages.

The ideal of submission is also reinforced by the idea that *fate* decided whom a woman married. The fate aspect of marriage may have relieved the tension between a woman's wishes and her parents' position of power in the late Middle Ages. Ketilríðr in *Víglundar saga* is just as submissive to fate as she is to her father, even if she has a clear preference for what she wants to happen: 'These things must happen,' she says when she is married off (she thinks) to an old man she really does not want to marry.¹⁵²

How a woman is to make peace with her fate finds clear expression in *Haukdæla þáttir* from the beginning of the fourteenth century.¹⁵³ This short story tells of the two daughters of the chieftain Guðmundr gríss, both named Þóra. Þóra the elder and Þóra the younger are described in the familiar way: 'they were considered the best matches among unmarried women.'¹⁵⁴ One day the elder Þóra begins to talk about what men she could imagine marrying. The younger Þóra, undoubtedly the sister favoured in the story, does not want to speculate in such matters, for 'everything is decided already; and hence I will not make any consideration on this or talk about it'.¹⁵⁵ The apparently universal power of fate nevertheless leaves room for choice: the elder Þóra wants her sister to tell her how she imagines her future anyway. For herself, she wants the chieftain Jón Sigmundarson to come and court her. The younger Þóra thinks her sister has chosen a good marriage. But she raises the bar even higher; she wants Þorvaldr Gizurarson as her husband. He is already married, but Þóra the younger believes his wife will soon die and he will ask for her afterward.

¹⁵² Vgl ch. 18, p. 98.

¹⁵³ *Haukdæla þáttir* is set in the early thirteenth century, but was probably written by the compiler of *Sturlunga saga* at the beginning of the fourteenth century. Úlfar Bragason, 'Sturlunga: A Political Statement', in *The Audience of the Sagas: Preprints*, vol. II, The Eighth International Saga Conference (Gothenburg: Gothenburg University, 1991), pp. 315–22 (pp. 318–20), argues that the function of the *þáttir* was to show that the feud between the Haukdælir and the Sturlungs was unavoidable. Anne Heinrichs, 'Die jüngere und die ältere Þóra: Form und Bedeutung einer Episode in *Haukdæla þáttir*', *alvissmál*, 5 (1995), 3–28, points out that the conversation between the two sisters alludes to the heroic quarrel between Brynhildr and Guðrún. Heinrichs thinks that the prominent aspect of fate in the *þáttir* sheds light on the rest of *Sturlunga saga*. It is also worth mentioning that other heroic stories were transformed by Christian reworkings, especially the myth of Sigurðr Fáfnisbani; see Jesse L. Byock, 'Sigurðr Fáfnisbani: An Eddic Hero Carved on Norwegian Stave Churches', in *Poetry in the Scandinavian Middle Ages*, ed. by Teresa Pàroli, Atti del 12° Congresso Internazionale di Studi sull'alto medioevo (Spoleto: Presso la sede del Centro studi, 1990), pp. 619–28; Bergur Þorgeirsson, 'Frán kamplust til ódmjukhet: *Reginismáls* anpassning til *Norna-Gests þátts* sammanhang', in *Sagas and the Norwegian Experience*, ed. by Hagland, pp. 75–84.

¹⁵⁴ Sts, I, 60: 'Þær þóttu þá beztir kvenkostir af ógíftum konum.'

¹⁵⁵ Sts, I, 61: 'því at allt mun ætlat fyrir, ok gerir því ekki hugsan fyrir slíku at bera eða geipa þar um nökkut'.

And this all comes to pass exactly as she has said. The elder Þóra tries to tempt fate; she also wants Þorvaldr Gizurarson after he becomes a widower. The two suitors come to the farm, but it is so late in the evening that they must wait until the next day to announce their business. That night, they are given the bed in which the sisters usually sleep. The elder Þóra knows that Þorvaldr usually sleeps on the outer side of the bed, in the same place she usually sleeps, and thinks that the man who sleeps on her side of the bed that night will ask for her. But that very night Jón and Þorvaldr trade places, and Þorvaldr sleeps on the side next to the wall. As the younger Þóra tries to explain to her big sister: 'Our destiny will still be according to what is already settled.'¹⁵⁶ The next day, it is indeed the younger sister that Þorvaldr Gizurarson asks for.

In *Haukdæla þáttr*, women's consent is reduced to saying 'I do' to what fate has already decreed. It is nevertheless striking that it is the women themselves who put fate into words and thereby steer the course of action. They are active in a certain sense with regard to their marriages, but after having once spoken their wishes there is no turning back. The sisters' conversation is put into a larger context over which they have no control, although within this framework they have a certain ability to choose to live in accordance with fate. This fate-ordained love is, in fact, characteristic of the late medieval folk mentality.¹⁵⁷ The magic of love and omens foretelling whom one would marry gained wide popularity against the background of a lifelong marital bond and the expectation that women should be submissive and obedient to their parents, faithful and persevering to their husbands. These were ethical imperatives that could make the belief in fate and love omens meaningful and reduce the individualistic potential of consent.

Conclusion

The wealth of late medieval saga literature gives us a picture of how Icelanders related to the paradoxical norm of double consent. Despite the presence of many traditional elements, we also see many new characteristics in the way Icelanders understood love's social consequences. One important characteristic of the new love stories is that they have marriage as a clear aim. People's level of expectations has been linked more closely to their marriage. Love before marriage has been removed from the traditional honour discourse. Instead, love stories focus on the honour of

¹⁵⁶ Sts, I, 62. 'En þat mun verða um forlög okkur, sem áðr er fyrir ætlat.'

¹⁵⁷ Cf. Rigmor Frimannslund, 'Skikk og tro ved friing og bryllup', in *Livets høgtider*, ed. by K. Rob. V. Wikman, Nordisk Kultur, 20 (Stockholm: Bonnier, 1949), pp. 42–87 (pp. 46–47); Ørnulf Hodne, *Kjærlighetsmagi: Folketro om forelskelse, erotikk og ekteskap* (Oslo: Cappelen, 1994), pp. 9–10.

the suitor and the woman. While a suitor can be dishonoured by a woman's disdain, a woman's honour is increasingly linked explicitly to her sexuality.¹⁵⁸

The pacification of women's love is thus as important a historical process as the sublimation of men's sexuality. The law of *consensus* was softened by other norms especially applicable to women: patience, perseverance, submission, and faithfulness. The Church was central to this change of mentality. Saga literature must have been an effective tool in changing Icelanders' attitudes to marriage, and far more successful as a didactic measure than the twelfth century's saint-versus-demon portrayals of sexual and matrimonial morals.

But such sermons would not have made inroads into Icelanders' marital mentalities if people had not been receptive to them. Even if the contemporary sagas say nothing about consent as a requirement for marriage in itself, there are a few indications that the aristocracy was moving towards an acceptance of the doctrine of consent before Bishop Árni's Christian law in 1275. For magnates, the new ideology of consent could have many advantages. First, the idea of a *jafnræði* and durable marriage was attractive for people who were weary of instability and feuding. Second, the love stories were associated with new norms for the type of men women could love. Late medieval aristocrats in royal service could profit by idealizing love between a couple of equal social status. The notion of 'true love' linked sexual relations to the desire for marriage and showed in an unfavourable light young men who exploited women as a means to power.

The Church, moreover, adapted its understanding of consent to the interests of the aristocracy. Women were exhorted to persevere and submit more than they were exhorted to marry for love. While the legendary sagas set in a secular environment emphasize women's evaluation of suitors based on common ideals, the clerical sagas deal with the woman's inner struggle between love and obedience. Those who endure receive a reward. It is difficult not to conclude that this mirrored the situation of real women in the late Middle Ages.

¹⁵⁸ On women's honour in medieval and early modern Scandinavia, see Torill Marlene Sandberg, 'Kvinneres æresidentitet i tre islandske sagaer', *Middelalderforum*, n.s., 2.2 (2002), 18–25; Sólborg Una Pálsdóttir, 'Hlutu konur enga virðingu?', in *Sæmdarmenn: Um heiður á þjóðveldisöld*, ed. by Helgi Þorláksson (Reykjavík: Hugvísindastofnun, Háskóla Íslands, 2001), pp. 41–55; Kari Telste, *Brutte løfter: En kulturhistorisk studie av kjønn og ære, 1700–1900*, Acta Humaniora, 67 (Oslo: UniPub, 1999), pp. 73–270; Anne Aune, *Avkriminalisering av leiermål: Ein studie av lov og rettspraksis i leiermålssaker i Nedre Telemark sorenskriveri 1727–1797*, Tingbokprosjektet, 10 (Oslo: Tingbokprosjektet, 1994); Marja Taussi Sjöberg, *Rätten och kvinnorna: Från släktmakt till statsmakt i Sverige på 1500- och 1600-talet* (Stockholm: Atlantis, 1996), pp. 135–54; Marie Lindstedt Cronberg, *Synd och skam: Ogifta mödrar på svensk landsbygd 1680–1880* (Lund: Historiska Institutionen, Lunds Universitetet, 1997); Malin Lennartsson, *I säng och sate: Relationer mellan kvinnor och män i 1600-talets Småland*, Bibliotheca historica Lundensis, 92 (Lund: Lund University Press, 1999), pp. 262–332.

Conclusion

This book is about love stories. Together they constitute a larger story — the story of how the thoughts of Norwegians and Icelanders about love and marriage changed in the course of the High Middle Ages.

Love as an Emotion

By all indications, Scandinavians in pre-state medieval society loved passionately. I have no hesitation in joining with those who dismiss the idea that romantic love was a twelfth-century French invention. What I have tried to convey, however, is that the timeless physical processes we experience as ‘falling in love’ and ‘being in love’ are experienced differently through changing cultural and symbolic categories just as much as through one’s social sphere, relationships, and identities. I have tried to put the development of the love stories of the Middle Ages in the context of changes that took place both in institutions and thought (hierarchical and egalitarian honour, new ideas about marriage, sin, punishment, gender roles, etc.). Since the changes in Norwegian and Icelandic love stories can be linked closely to new social parameters and cultural modes of thought, I believe the literary development also reflects a genuine shift in people’s understanding and experience of love.

One constant throughout the entire medieval period was that the love between a man and a woman had great social significance. The person one loved and how one loved were closely bound up with the individual’s social identity and maintaining relations between the household and the different social strata. Love stories gave room for the exploration of new social identities in the wake of the upheavals of the High Middle Ages, particularly the rise of a literate clergy without a primary association with a household, and an aristocracy in the service of the king. For this very reason, it would be difficult to write a medieval love story today; a modern version of such a story would almost inevitably connect the main character’s experience of

love to the struggle of feelings against rationality and the individual's personal development and quest for 'freedom'. Such cultural categories are important for us, but were far less prominent in medieval people's understanding of their sexual desires.

Love and Gender

By taking gender perspectives as a premise for this study, I have assumed that social and cultural processes of change have had a different significance for women and men. Moreover, I have proceeded on the assumption that women were historical agents, even if the sources were produced by men and the scope of action was different and often more confined for women than for men. The degree to which the sagas' representation of women's actions corresponds to reality is a very real problem of interpretation. On the one hand, the sources give us male conceptions of women. On the other hand, we find that women were strongly integrated into the honour discourse in the early Middle Ages. If one looks at honour as a real and pervading cultural factor, it is difficult to argue against the important role women could have played with regard to honour. Nevertheless, we must be careful not to romanticize the position of women in the early Scandinavian medieval period; women could also be abused in the course of men's pursuit of honour. But it appears that women had personal honour, and that it was not linked to sexual behaviour in and of itself. A few women were able to exploit this concept, not primarily to defend their sex but to better their own position and honour. This changed with the courtly-Christian love discourse. That women's honour was linked more strongly and directly to their sexuality is one of the most important changes for women in the Norse Middle Ages.

Did this lead to a narrowing of the parameters for women's actions? It is hard to make sweeping generalizations about the opportunities of *all* women. There is a certain element of individualization in the acceptance of the doctrine of consent, but we must take care not to regard this as a linear development. The individualizing potential of consent was counteracted by other tendencies. Parents still had very much to say about their daughters' marriage partners. *Giptingarmenn* were still a long way from approving just any suitor. New norms dictated that women should be humble and submissive to authority. The belief that the person one would marry was determined by fate could lead to a passive role for women in the process leading up to marriage. Lifelong marriage could be a heavy yoke for many women whose parents determined the man they were to marry based on generally accepted norms and ideas of who was *jafnræði*.

Nevertheless, a few women would have found increased room for manoeuvrability, if they played their cards right. Through the general acceptance of consent as the formal prelude to marriage, they could oppose their parents' authority, and possibly receive support from the Church and the law in choosing not to agree to an arranged marriage. Churchmen could still potentially count on the norms of parental control and daughters' obedience, but the doctrine of consent and the ideal of personal

responsibility were open to interpretation. Strategic use of these concepts could legitimize opposition to despotic parental discretion: daughters and parents took up negotiating positions with one another through the conflicts between ideals, norms, and practice.¹ Marriages contracted in secret with mutual consent and in God's sight were and remained valid; faithful love was irrevocably introduced as a positive emotion in the consciousness of the youth. It is precisely the profusion of ideas and contradicting norms that admit the possibility of the individual to influence the course of history. Small changes in thought can lead to great differences in behaviour patterns. In such situations, I believe women's attitudes and patterns of action were just as important as those of men.

Love, the Development of the State, and Church Organization

Despite the obvious weak points in Elias's theory of civilization, it is appealing as an explanatory model because it does not focus merely on people being passively indoctrinated with the norms of the state. The theory allows for individuals in different social groups who actively sought to resolve challenges to their identities in a society where the right to exercise violence was largely held (or constructed) by a more impersonal state power. This perspective gives an impression of medieval people as individuals thinking and acting in a complicated world, even if social belonging set boundaries for their choices and behavioural patterns. The new impulses from the European continent regarding love and marriage were able to assume great significance because societal upheavals changed the role of the aristocracy and created new rival social groups. Courtly conceptions of love and new matrimonial ideals gave alternative norms that individuals with new social functions could latch onto. Particularly in the period from 1150 to 1250, new love stories were told and heard in Norway and Iceland. Such stories were followed by new realities and expectations, such as the meaning of marriage for the individual, a more hierarchical societal structure, and new gender roles that brought with them increasing disapproval of loose women and muscle-bound berserks.

¹ Studies on medieval England indicate that laypeople, women included, were well acquainted with the doctrine of consent; see Michael M. Sheehan, 'The Formation and Stability of Marriage in Fourteenth-Century England: Evidence of an Ely Register', *Mediaeval Studies*, 33 (1971), 228–63; Sheehan, 'Choice of Marriage Partner in the Middle Ages: Development and Mode of Application of a Theory of Marriage', *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History*, 1 (1978), 1–33; Frederik Pedersen, 'Did the Medieval Laity Know the Canon Law Rules on Marriage? Some Evidence from Fourteenth-Century York Cause Papers', *Mediaeval Studies*, 56 (1994), 111–52; Shannon McSheffrey, "'I will never have none ayenst my faders will": Consent and the Making of Marriage in the Late Medieval Diocese of London', in *Women, Marriage, and Family in Medieval Christendom: Essays in Memory of Michael M. Sheehan, C.S.B.*, ed. by Constance M. Rousseau and Joel T. Rosenthal, *Studies in Medieval Culture*, 37 (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1998), pp. 153–74.

One of the major objections to Elias's theory of civilization is that the development of 'courtly' ideas of love must be seen in the context of the growing number of clerics in the wake of increasing ecclesiastical organization. The Church of the Scandinavian Middle Ages has too often been seen as a monolithic institution. Individual clerics in different branches of the Church's hierarchy certainly had distinct voices. That the Church regarded consent as very positive and sexuality as rather negative did not mean that all Churchmen internalized these norms. Local clergy, chapter clerics, and mendicant brothers were obliged to deviate from traditional male ideals. They had to find their own role and identity in Norse society. Such clerics could be more receptive than others to new male ideals. It is indeed within this group that we first see signs of a more romantic understanding of love at the end of the twelfth century.

Thus, the Church's role in the changes of mentality regarding love has no direct connection with official Church teaching. The leaders of the Church aimed rather to suppress such tendencies within their own ranks. But the Gregorian reforms led to many circumstances that made love a status marker for clerics. For the first time higher skill requirements were set for clerics. Monastic institutions of learning and universities tried to attract students from all over Europe. Classical writings were put forward as required reading; there was no longer a monopoly on the interpretation of Ovid and other writers. Moreover, the growing ecclesiastical organization needed a growing number of priests. Many were strongly rooted in the secular world and its ideas, a background that clung to them even after they had entered the priesthood. The third point is that priests were cut off from using control over women as a symbol of power or a class marker; control over their strong feelings thus became an ideal. Fourthly, royal authority — King Sverrir being a notable example — desired to counteract blood feuds and private revenge. This contributed to the recognition of new male ideals unconnected to personal honour. Both the king and the aristocracy in the thirteenth century could see advantages in having men's honour connected to class from birth onwards. That way, love could be made safe and idealized.

This is not to say that the old heroic ideals disappeared overnight. Many would say that some elements of them exist to this day. The point is that from the thirteenth century, the heroic understanding of love was no longer absolute and universal. Honour was like a pair of balancing scales; and once love was no longer used as a weight on that scale, passion could be a distinguishing emotion. Sexuality, on the other hand, was regarded as potentially dirty and vulgar. The Church had been preaching this for more than a thousand years, but it was in the High Middle Ages that the social conditions were right for the Norse aristocracy to adopt such ideas.

Medieval Love after the Middle Ages?

I shall briefly look at certain characteristics of the development of attitudes and practices regarding love in the late Middle Ages in the light of studies of post-Reformation source material in Norway.

The potentially individualistic power of consent was not exploited to such a great degree as to shake parents' authoritarian role in the peasant society of the late Middle Ages. Despite the intrinsic potential for conflict between parents' and children's consent, the idea of double consent continued to function up to modern times. In particular, two circumstances in the late medieval and early modern period indicate that the new stories of love and consent of the High Middle Ages ushered in lasting changes.

First, the new ideas about double consent and premarital love took ritual form in the custom of *nattefrieri* or 'night-courting'. From the early modern period, we have accounts of young men going on Saturday evenings to visit marriageable girls who waited for them in the loft of the farm. Gradually a girl would make an indication of which one she liked the best, often by giving the favoured youth the best to eat and drink. When the young man was certain that the girl liked him and he could expect her to say yes, he went to her father to ask for her hand in a more formal way.²

The origin of this custom is quite obscure; it is first mentioned in sources from the early modern period. Seen in the light of late medieval saga literature and the portrayal of premarital love in the ballads, it is not improbable that the custom may have existed as early as the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century. In any case, these rituals have been understood and apparently shaped by the ideology surrounding double consent.

The other circumstance that supports the impression that people in the late Middle Ages accepted and actively used the doctrine of consent is the fact that state and Church had difficulty in discouraging private betrothals in the early modern period. After the Reformation, marriage was no longer considered a sacrament but rather an institution that was beneficial to the health of society. Secret marriage and private ceremonies were forbidden with the introduction of the marriage ordinance in 1589. Secular authorities tried to make the contracting of a marriage an official concern.

But private betrothal and the principle that *consensus facit matrimonii* ('consent makes the marriage') had taken root among the people. A striking example of this can be seen in a 1622 case from the cathedral in Bergen. Tøger Jespersen Foss took Margrete Søfrensdatter to court because he believed she was betrothed to him. A

² On the age, practices, and variations of 'night-courting', see Troels Troels-Lund, *Dagligt Liv i Norden i det 16de Aarhundrede*, 14 vols (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1903–04), IX: *Bryllup* (1904), pp. 12–22; Rigmor Frimannslund, 'Et verk om nattefriings utviklingshistorie: Med et tillegg om skikkens former i Norge', *Maal og Minne*, 1938, 141–50; Frimannslund, 'Skikk og tro ved friing og bryllup', in *Livets høgtider*, ed. by K. Rob. V. Wikman, Nordisk Kultur, 20 (Stockholm: Bonnier, 1949), pp. 42–87; Kristofer Visted and Hilmar Stigum, *Vår gamle bondekultur*, 2 vols, 3rd edn (Oslo: Cappelen, 1971), I, 400–12; Anne Swang, 'Ungdommens festbruk: Nattefrieriet', in *Studiet af fester*, ed. by Flemming Hemmersam and Bjarne Hodne (Copenhagen: Reitzel, 1979), pp. 105–19; Loftur Guttormsson, 'Familien', in *Den nordiske verden*, 2 vols, ed. by Kirsten Hastrup (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1992), I, 183–201 (pp. 196–98); Kari Telste, *Mellom liv og lov: Kontroll av seksualitet i Ringerike og Hallingdal 1652–1710*, Tingbokprosjektet, 5 (Oslo: IKS, Avdeling for historie, University of Oslo, 1993), pp. 22–24.

witness, one Eline, explained her knowledge of the circumstances thus: ‘Tøger Jesperssøn and Margrete were once in her [Eline’s] house. At that time Tøger said to Eline, “Here sits my betrothed, Margrete Søfrensdatter.” Eline answered, “Is she your betrothed?” “Yes, by God,” he said; “she has given me four shillings for a glass of beer.”’³ Here Tøger misunderstood Margrete’s gift as a sign of consenting to marriage, something that indeed became clear during the lawsuit.⁴ In our context, it is remarkable that he believed that such an informal exchange could be a sign of a valid and binding promise of marriage.

Until the end of the seventeenth century, the judicial system and public authorities seem to have shown a certain degree of acceptance when people undertook private betrothals and began to live together without officially getting married.⁵ Therefore, sexual relations and children born before marriage were not condemned if the woman could prove the child’s father had promised marriage. Cohabitation and sexual relations in the period between the betrothal and the wedding were not considered immoral until the eighteenth century. In 1734 either written or sworn evidence of promised marriage was required if a woman wanted to legally oblige her child’s father to marry her. After this time, it was much more difficult for women to bring lawsuits against men who had given them verbal promises of marriage.⁶ But it was not until 1799 that the significance of engagement to the indissolubility of the relationship was definitively abolished and a church ceremony became the only way to contract a valid marriage.

Despite strong opposition from the strait-laced bourgeoisie, the custom of *nattefrieri* continued in rural areas of Norway until the beginning of the twentieth century. It was perhaps not until after World War II that Norwegians came to the point of distancing themselves from the love discourse that was formed in the Middle Ages. Today the notion of romantic love seems often to have been superseded by an urban culture of ‘confluent love’ divorced from the reproductive aspect and less bound to

³ ‘Tøger Jesperssøn oc Margrete var en gang i hendis /Elines/ huus. Da sagde Tøger til Eline: Her sidder min festemøe Margrete Søfrensdatter. Suarede Eline: Er hun eders festemøe? Ja, Gud, sagde hand. Hun haffuer giffuet mig 4 skilling til en Kande øll.’ Cited from Hanne Marie Johansen, ‘Ekteskap, erstatning eller avvisning? Om makesøking og falske ekteskapsløfter i Norge 1570–1800’, *Historisk Tidsskrift*, 70 (1991), 1–29 (p. 14).

⁴ See Kari Telste, *Brutte løfter: En kulturhistorisk studie av kjønn og ære 1700–1900*, Acta Humaniora, 67 (Oslo: UniPub, 1999), pp. 18–32, on the communicative foundations for a promise of marriage. Some, like Tøger Jesperssøn, may have missed essential elements in this social game.

⁵ Johansen, ‘Ekteskap’; cf. Telste, *Mellom liv og lov*, p. 88.

⁶ See Johansen, ‘Ekteskap’; Hanne Marie Johansen, *Separasjon og skilsmisse i Norge, 1536–1909: En familie- og rettshistorisk studie*, HIFOs skriftserie, 4 (Oslo: Den Norske Historiske Forening, 2001); Anne Aune, *Avkriminalisering av leiermål: Ein studie av lov og rettspraksis i leiermålssaker i Nedre Telemark sorenskriveri 1727–1797*, Tingbokprosjektet, 10 (Oslo: Tingbokprosjektet, 1994); Telste, *Brutte løfter*.

the expectation of an officially sanctioned, lifelong relationship. Love is no longer necessarily based on faithfulness 'till death us do part'.⁷ In a way, love affairs today resemble the heroic discourse where partners in the relationship continually evaluate one another, where there is little distinction between love and sexuality, and where women's extramarital sexuality has relatively little significance for how she is regarded by the community.

The differences between couples today and in the early Middle Ages are nevertheless clear: financial independence and individualism make modern couples very different from those of a thousand years ago. But certain characteristics are familiar: love's important role in shaping an individual's social identity, and not least every person's need to be loved and fear of rejection. I am convinced that the individual's search for acknowledgement and love has been a major driving force in history.

⁷ Anthony Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1992), pp. 61–64.

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Abbreviations

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FSN *Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda*, ed. by Guðni Jónsson, 4 vols (Reykjavík: Prentsmiðjan Edda, 1950)
ÍF Íslensk Fornrit (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1933–)
KLNLM *Kulturhistoriskt Lexikon för nordisk medeltid från vikingatid til reformationstid*, vols I–XXII (Malmö: Allhem, 1956–78)
MSE *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, ed. by Philip Pulsiano (New York: Garland, 1993)
NGL *Norges gamle Love indtil 1387*, ed. by Rudolf Keyser and others, 5 vols (Christiania: Grøndahl, 1846–95)
NT *Norrøne tekster* (Oslo: Norsk historisk kjeldeskrift-institutt/Riksarkivet, 1977–)
STUGNL *Samfund til Udgivelse af Gammel Nordisk Litteratur* (Copenhagen: Samfundet, 1880–1956)

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